

BORIS
PASTERNAK

Safe Conduct

*An Early Autobiography
And Other Works*

Translated by
ALEC BROWN

Five Lyric Poems

Translated by
LYDIA PASTERNAK-SLATER



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*Parting
Ploughing Time
In Hospital
It Is Not Seemly
The air is full of after-thunder freshness*

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ON TRANSLATING PASTERNAK

BORIS PASTERNAK belongs to a special line of Russian literature. Against the background of Church Slavonic (really early Macedonian) Pushkin and Lermontov created a prose instrument modelled on French and English, beautiful but, having no popular roots, frightfully resistant to change—significantly, the Revolution which altered so much else left the structure of the Russian language unchanged. But some writers have more real roots—Leskov and Ostrovski, the dramatist, Turgenev and Fiodor Sologub, Remizov—and Pasternak.

My translations of Pasternak's work basically represent the completion of versions made or sketched some thirty-five years ago, when the volumes of poetry, *My Sister, Life, Themes and Variations*, 1905, and the four *Stories* appeared. (Regretfully, *Lieutenant Schmidt*, the sister poem to 1905, with its lovely orchestration and exquisite changes of *tempo*, I have not included—the sketches made long ago all went with the wind, recovery from memory and completion must wait.)

Brief comment on the present work may be of interest.

THE STORIES

The four stories reveal Pasternak's attachment to music, for they constitute a classical symphony in four movements. The first, in its development section embodying so many of the poet's basic symbols taken from the natural scene throughout the Russian seasons, deals—as main subject—with the early development of consciousness (otherwise discussed succinctly in the third poem of the cycle *You think I could forget?*). It also exemplifies the way in which he uses reminiscences of other poets' work (here Lermontov's) as part of his raw material.*

*In the Theme and Variations he uses poems of Pushkin in the same way.

ON TRANSLATING PASTERNAK

The second movement (a *scherzo*) is at once a subtle symbolic exposition of the Marxist concept of the union of theory and practice, and a very ribald love story, full of expressionistic humour, in which a new Heine, who is a poet of deeds as well as words, is challenged by an Italian poet who on the other side of the watershed is one of words only, to prove his mettle by 'an Apelles stroke', and as answer uses his own brush in no uncertain fashion to seduce the challenger's mistress in that vainglorious fellow's home town.

The third movement, an *adagio*, is a very impressive statement (in the passage about the actors) of his essentially revolutionary abhorrence of the cheapening of standards by vulgarization for the masses—the same thought as that expressed in the introductory lyric to 1905.

The fourth movement (a *rondo fugato*) is at once an ironical comment on the relations of the sexes in procreation and a clever assertion of the possible permanence of personal loyalties despite a man's adherence to the healthy logic of the revolution, with its new social demands.

SAFE CONDUCT

In his autobiographical essay Pasternak is explicit enough. It contains very positive statements about his world-view—his roots in music, his philosophical position,* his loyalty to the latest trends of science, and, once again, his scorn for the Stalinist prostitution of the revolution in a return to philistine middle-class ideals. In my translation of this work I have striven to render his account of himself as lucidly as possible without, in the crucial *stretto* passages, losing too much of the symbolic poetic style in which they are written.

THE POEMS

My translations of the poems (surely an arrogant adventure) do call for some comment

* Moving from post-Hegelianism to Marxism (as indeed Mr Alastair MacIntyre, Lecturer in Philosophy in Leeds University, recently suggested in a Third Programme lecture). Within the dialectical process of society the artist contributes to the common cause by processes not subject to conscious external direction.

First, some general remarks. Pasternak's use of words is based on one permanent principle. rejection of the notion that 'of course' they are ultimately to tell us something in the manner of a monthly statement from a shop

In addition to their 'direct', open impact, they inevitably also have unconsciously apprehended associative meanings. And when used in groups, in language perhaps on the surface 'ordinary', words already rich singly readily proliferate new overtones and undertones, and each phrase of them as a whole does the same. *And so does the poem as a whole.*

In the ordinary use of language, the partials are deliberately given a minimum of attention. In 'ordinary' speech we tend to become as indifferent to them as we are to many other subtle impacts on the senses. Pasternak gives these partials keen attention. And plays with them.

In such writing it is not the whole which grows from the parts, by simple addition. Creation is bi-directional. *Words and the images grow out of the whole.* Assonance is used not as mere incidental music. It is developed more fundamentally, to germinate wherever its fortuitous gifts coincide with the general purpose of the total poem. The result is a scintillation of emphasis beyond the simple 'logical' theme.

Hence, translating Pasternak's poetry, one is obliged to work not to, but from the basic symbol (that which is germinated by the whole—the form, the general meaning, the background material). Only when this is established can one allow the detailed words and images to grow out of that created, symbolic whole in the new language and environment. This is how Pasternak himself translates (because, though on a lower, less conscious level, earlier poets were also partly symbolists).

For instance, the grasshopper in Keats's sonnet *On the Grasshopper and the Cricket* ceases to be the rather solitary fellow whom Keats knew and turns into a carefree Russian lad with his accordion on a feast-day when the girls dance and sing on the green. The daffodils at the beginning of *Endymion* become narcissi (the daffodil is rare in Russia), and the brook springs from under a cliff, rather than meanders through meads. *'White his shroud as the mountain snow'*, sings Ophelia,

but to a Russian snow has other overtones, and in Pasternak's text of *Hamlet* the mountains disappear.

Pasternak's poetry, though a carefully built musical edifice of symbols, is in the full Russian tradition spoken poetry, even more, it is deliberately dramatic and declamatory. Stalinism did not scorn him because he was a delicate songster churring unintelligibly inside an ivory tower, but because he will insist on perching on the tower's weather-vane, to become a storm-cock* persistently proclaiming basic ideals and protesting against a smugness which negates the revolution. Pasternak does not write for the eye, and one needs to recite the poems in a bold voice, out loud, as if to somebody in the next room, using the phrase rhythms of everyday speech, from the raw material of which each entity is fused.

Apart from two notes in the text (pp. 293 and 304) I think the poems need no more comment, unless it is to add that the best commentary on 1905 is Shostakovich's XIth Symphony, a parallel work on the same theme.

All that is said about Pasternak's poetry applies largely to his prose. This too, however subtle, is frank, open, conversational and expostulatory.

15 January, 1959

ALEC BROWN.

* *The Thrushes* is deeply symbolic.

Acknowledgement

The poems translated by Lydia Pasternak-Slater are from *Poems by Boris Pasternak*, published in 1958 by Peter Russell, Fairwarp, Sussex.

Stories

ZHENIA'S CHILDHOOD
IL TRATTO DI APELLE
LETTERS FROM TULA
AERIAL ROUTES

Zhenia's Childhood

THE LONG DAYS

I

SHE was born and grew up in Perm. Her most distant memories, like once her little ships and dolls, sank deep into shaggy bearskins; the house was full of them. Her father managed the Lunievski Mines and also had extensive connexions with the Chusova River mill-owners.

Gift bearskins were dark brown, deep-piled. The white she-bear in the nursery was like a huge bedraggled chrysanthemum. This was the bearskin specially acquired for 'our pet Zhenia's room'—she had taken a fancy to it, they at once went into the shop and bargained and bought it and a man delivered it.

They used to spend their summers in a chalet on the far side of the River Kama. In those years, Zhenia was put to bed early. She could not see the glow of the Motovilikha fires. But one day something frightened the Angora cat and it fidgeted in its sleep and woke Zhenia up. Then she saw there were grown-ups on the balcony. The alder which overhung the railing was as dense and scintillating as ink. The tea in the glasses was red. Cuffs and cards were yellow, the cloth green. Just like being delirious. Only this being delirious had a name. And Zhenia knew the name. It was *cards*.

On the other hand, it was absolutely beyond her to know what was going on far, far away, on the other bank. That had no name, nor had it got any definite colour or shape. When it got excited, it was all near and dear, not delirium like that muttering and twirling in the clouds of tobacco smoke, casting fresh, windy shadows on the yellowish timbers of the balcony.

And Zhenia burst into tears. Her father came in and explained. Her English governess turned her face to the wall. Her father's explanation was brief. That was Motovilikha that she could see. Such a big girlie Hushabye. Girlie understood nothing, gratified swallowed a tear that rolled down. Because that was all she wanted: what the incomprehensible thing was *called*. It was called *Motovilikha*. And on this occasion that was the explanation of everything, because on this occasion a name still had a complete child-wise reassuring significance.

But when morning came, she began to ask questions about what Motovilikha was and what they did there in the night, and learned that Motovilikha was an ironworks, a government ironworks, and cast iron was made there and out of cast iron . . . But that did not interest her, what interested her was whether what they called ironworks were a special sort of tyrant-kings and who lived in them, but she did not ask anybody those questions. For some reason she deliberately kept them to herself.

This was the morning when she emerged from the babyhood in which she had still been during the night. For the first time in her life she sensed that there was some sort of phenomenon in what a phenomenon either kept to itself or, if it revealed it to anyone, revealed exclusively to grown-ups able to shout, punish, smoke and bolt doors. For the first time she became like her new Motovilikha. She did not say everything that came into her mind, but kept the most important, the essential and worrying part of it to herself.

The years rolled on. Ever since they were born the children had been so accustomed to their father's absences that in their eyes rarely eating dinner and never eating any supper became a special characteristic of fatherhood. But in that gravely empty, utterly vacant house more and more often there began to be dancing and fun and drinking and eating, but Zhenia's English governess's chilly teaching could never replace the presence of her mother, who filled the whole house with the sweetly oppressive atmosphere of her touchy temper and obstinacy, which was like a sort of electricity.

In through the curtains poured the quiet northern daylight.

That did not smile. The oak sideboard looked grey. The silver reared heavy and oppressive. Across the white cloth moved the lavender-washed hands of the governess. She never shared out wrong, she never lacked patience, and a sense of fair play was an essential part of her just as much as her bedroom was always clean and tidy and her books too.

When she had brought in the food the housemaid hung about in the dining-room; she did not go back to the kitchen till the time came to bring in another dish. All comfortable and very fine. But frightfully sad

And since for Zhenia these were years of loneliness and suspicion and a sense of sin and what one wanted to call *christianisme* in French since so much could never be called just 'christianity', it sometimes seemed to her that after all life could not possibly be any better, nor ought to be, because of her wickedness and the insufficiency of her repentance, so it all served her right. Whereas, though the children were never conscious of this, it was just the other way round, their whole inner life had been badly jolted, it was in ferment, they were completely baffled by their parents' relationship to them, whenever mamma and father were home, that is, when they came, not home, but back to the house.

Her father's rare moments of humour failed altogether and invariably missed the mark. He was aware of this and that too the children understood. His features invariably wore a sort of bloom of dismal embarrassment. Whenever he lost his temper he became a total stranger, yes, a stranger, and in the very instant when he began to lose control of himself. You don't have any feeling for strangers. The children never, never answered him back.

But for some time since the criticism coming from the nursery and, if unspoken, clear in the children's eyes, had found him quite insensitive. It was just not noticed by him. Resistant to every such reagent, somehow unknowable, therefore pitiable, *this* father was terrible, quite the opposite of the lose-his-temper father—the stranger. His little daughter was more moved by *him* than his son was. But they were both troubled most of all by their mother.

Mother smothered them with caresses, mother was always giving them presents, and was always spending hours on end with them when they least of all wanted her to, for in such moments it was all such a burden to their child consciences because it was so unmerited, nor did they recognize themselves in the lavish petting names which her instinct was then wont to shower over them.

Hence often, when one of those rare moments of peace came into their souls in which they ceased to be aware of the criminal within them, when all that mysterious force which, just like the fever you had when measles were coming on, all that mysterious force which would take control protected them, their mother seemed alienated from them, as if she avoided them, getting irritable for no cause whatsoever. The postman came. The letter was given to the addressee, that is, to mamma, and they saw her take it without so much as a 'thank-you'.

"Go to your room," she says suddenly, to Zhenia. Bangs the door. And they both quietly hung their heads and felt so miserable, yes, for a long, long time felt so wretched and puzzled.

At first they used often to cry, then, after one particularly violent fit of temper, they began to be afraid, after which, as the years went by, it changed to a concealed dislike which took ever deeper root within them.

Anything that did pass from parents to children came their way adventitiously and inopportunately, not at all of their prompting, but for some quite unconnected reason, and was somehow remote, as things always are when clandestine, night hearts aching at the gates, with all the town abed.

.

Here was the ambience of the children's upbringing, though they knew nothing of it, because rare is the adult who knows, who hears what shapes him, makes him, knits him to be a human being. Life endows very few with awareness of what it does to them, too passionately it loves its creation and in its

workings it speaks to none but some of those few who actively wish life success and love life's workshop. Nor is any person empowered to give aid, though any one may hinder. How can life be hindered? Like this: imbue a tree with concern for its own growth and it will grow weedy or be all stock or squander everything on one leaf, because it will have forgotten the universe, which should always be the example, and, producing something which is one of a thousand, it will make thousands of copies of one thing.

And to ensure against dead wood in the soul—to have no check to its growth, so man should not mix his stupidity in the planning of his immortal essence—there has been much instituted that distracts his frivolous curiosity from life, which does not like him to look on at its workings and in endless ways avoids him. It is to this end that all true religions, all general concepts and all the prejudices of men have been introduced, the most striking and most entertaining of these being psychology!

The children had now emerged from primal infancy. The concepts of punishment, requital, reward and justice had now in child fashion entered their souls, distracting their conscious minds, so that life might do to them what it felt was required, what was important, what was beautiful.

II

It was something Miss Hawthorn herself would never have done. But during one of her attacks of unprovoked sentimentality towards the children, Mrs Luvers over the merest trifle gave the English governess more than a little tongue-pie. And that was the end of the governess. Soon after, without anybody really noticing, a curious, weedy Frenchwoman sprouted in her place. Later all that Zhenia could recall was that this Frenchwoman resembled a fly and nobody liked her. Her name was lost for ever, nor could Zhenia even give a hint among what syllables or sounds it might be found. All she could recall was that, first, the Frenchwoman shouted at her, then she took a

pair of scissors and snipped and sheared the patch of the bearskin which was bloodstained off short.

Zhenia had the impression that now people would always shout at her and her headache would never stop, it would always be with her, and she would never more be able to understand that page in her favourite book, it just all swam together in front of her eyes like any lesson-book after dinner.

The day dragged on endlessly. Her mother was out. She was not sorry about that. She even thought she was pleased

Very soon, however, the long day was consigned to oblivion, somewhere among the French past and future anterior tenses, giving the hyacinths their watering and going for a walk along Sibirskaya and Okhanskaya Streets. The day was indeed so completely forgotten that the longness of another long day, the second in order in her life, only struck her and was felt by her in the early evening, while she was reading by lamplight and the slow-moving story was giving rise to hundreds of most trivial reflections.

When later she called to mind that house in Osinskaya Street where they were living at the time, it always figured in her imagination exactly as she saw it just as the light was fading on that second long day. It had really been a very long day. Outside it was Spring. In the Urals Spring is weedy, slow to come to fruition, then all at once it breaks out all over the place, noisily, in a mere night, and after that never ceases to be all over the place and noisy. The lamps with their shadows merely marked off the emptiness of the evening air. They gave out no light, merely swelled from inside, like diseased fruit, suffering from a dropsy, at the same time cloudy and clear, which expanded their puffy shades. Themselves absent. Falling into their proper places on the tables, coming down from the ceiling plaster in the rooms in which she had grown accustomed to seeing them. Yet the contact between those lamps and the rooms was far less than their contact with the Spring sky. They seemed to be held up close into that, like glasses of water to somebody ill in bed. At heart Zhenia was out in the street where the servants' chatter teemed and the drip-a-drip grew thinner as it froze up for the night. That was where the lamps

vanished in the evening. Her parents were away, though it seems that her mother was expected back that very day. That long day, or very soon after. Yes, probably. Or she may have turned up unexpectedly. Perhaps that was it.

She was beginning to get into bed when she noticed that the day had been long for the same reason that the other one had, and her first thought was to get the scissors and cut out those patches in her nightgown and the bed-sheet. Then she decided to take the Frenchwoman's face-powder and rub that in white. And she had just taken the powder-box when in came the Frenchwoman and smacked her. It was of course the powder that made the sin. Powdering herself! The ideal! The last straw! Now at last the governess understood. She had had her eye on this for some time.

Zhenia cried because of the smacking, because of the nagging and from wounded sensitivity, because, though she felt innocent of what the Frenchwoman suspected her of, she knew something about herself which—and this she could *feel*—was far more beastly than what she was suspected of. She must—this she felt persistently till she could feel nothing else at all, felt it in her calves and her temples—this, no matter how, this at all cost, she knew, though neither for what reason or to what end, she must hide. Dully aching, all her joints fused into one mesmeric insistence, exhausting her, wearing her out. That insistence was part of her very flesh, concealing the sense of it all from the child, and by making her behave like a criminal made her conclude the bleeding to be some revolting and beastly sort of evil.

"*Menteuse!*" cried the governess. "Liar!" All she could do was go on saying "*No*", stubbornly shutting herself away in the most loathsome of all states, somewhere between the disgrace of illiteracy and the shame of a street quarrel. Had to hug herself to the wall, trembling, gritting her teeth, but letting the tears flow. She could not go and fling herself in the river, because it was still cold outside and the Kama was full of the last flocs.

Neither Zhenia herself nor the Frenchwoman heard the doorbell in time. The hullabaloo the two of them were making had

soaked so deep into the dark brown bearskins, and when her mother came into the room it was already too late, she found her little daughter in tears and the Frenchwoman scarlet with rage. She demanded an explanation. The Frenchwoman told her straight that—no, not Zhenia, no, ‘your child’!—‘your child’ used powder, she had in fact noticed it previously and—but mother did not let her finish—her horror was not put on—Zhenia was not even thirteen.

“Zhenia! You? Oh dear Heaven, whatever are we coming to?”

In that moment her mother thought such language fitting, to make out she had already been aware that her daughter was beginning to be badly behaved and getting into shocking habits, and it was all her fault for not taking steps earlier; now see to what depths her Zhenia had sunk!

“Zhenia,” she said, “now tell me the whole truth or it will be so much the worse! What were you doing . . . ?”

‘*With that powder-box*’ no doubt Mrs Lüvers intended to say. But she said “*with this thing*” and, grabbing the ‘*thing*’, waved it about.

“Mamma, don’t you believe Mamzel, I never did . . .”

And she burst out sobbing. And in those sobs her mother could hear ominous sounds which were not there at all, and she felt she was guilty and inwardly was horrified by herself, thought she must now put everything right, and, even if it was all against her maternal instincts, must ‘rise to the necessary level of decency and child-upbringing’, and she resolved not to be moved at all by sympathy, merely to wait till that flood of heartrending tears dried up.

And she sat down on the bed, gazing calmly and vacantly at the end of the bookshelf. It smelt of expensive scent. When her little girl came to herself again, she once more began to cross-examine her. Zhenia shot one glance up at the window and, before her eyes were properly dry, there she was sobbing again. The ice-man was coming, it must be the ice-man making that noise. A star twinkled. So cold and so malleable, the never-ebbing empty night rustled, blackly. Zhenia looked away from the window. There was now an undertone of impatience in her mother’s voice, while her French governess stood

ZHENIA'S CHILDHOOD

by the wall, the embodiment of gravity and concentrated educational principles, her hand, like that of a junior officer with his general, resting on her watch ribbon. Again Zhenia looked out at the river and the stars. Her mind was at last made up. Despite the cold and the fies. And—she plunged.

Tongue-tied, terror-stricken, beside herself, she told her mother about *it*. Her mother let her go on to the very end solely because she was so struck by the emotion the child put into her communication. For she had of course guessed the truth from the first few words. Not even the words—the tremendous gulp the child gave before she began. So she heard her out, so glad, loving her so, faint from her fondness for the dear little mite. With an urge all the time to fling her arms round her daughter's neck and burst into tears herself. But there were always those educational principles, so, getting up from the bed, she snatched away the coverlet, then called her daughter to her and, stroking her little head so slowly, so slowly, so caressingly, said what a good girl she was. The words broke quickly from her, then noisily she strode to the window, turning away from Zhenia and her governess.

Zhenia could not see her French governess at all. The tears were transfixed. So was her mother, the whole room.

"Who makes the bed?"

Senseless question. The little girl shuddered. She was sorry for Grusha, the maid. Then, in French, Zhenia recognized it but did not recognize the words, something was said; stern expressions, too. Then, again to her, in quite a different voice:

"Zhenia, my pet, go into the dining-room a moment, will you, dearie. I'll be with you in a moment. I want to tell you all about the lovely chalet we've hired for you—for us, next summer."

The lamps were themselves again, just as they were in the winter, at home at the Lüvers', warm lamps, hearty, loyal. Across the blue table-cloth lay Mummy's frisky marten neck-tie.

Case won staying on over holiday wait till end holy week if . . .

The remainder was illegible, the telegram was folded at the corner. Tired and happy, Zhenia sat down on the edge of the sofa. Sat modestly, nicely, exactly as she sat half a year later, six months later, in the corridor of the Ekaterinburg Lycée, on the end of a cold, yellow bench, when she got full marks for her answers in Russian oral and was told she 'might go'.

.

The next morning her mother explained what she must do whenever it happened, it was nothing to worry about, it would happen often. She did not give anything a name or explain anything, though she did add that from now on she would be her little girl's teacher, as she was not going away any more. And the French governess was dismissed for her inattentiveness, after having been with them some months. When the driver came to take her away and she was going down the stairs, on the landing she met the doctor on his way up and he did not even say *good-bye*. She guessed that he must know all about it. She frowned and shrugged her shoulders.

At the front door was the housemaid who had answered it to the doctor, and afterwards, in the hall, where Zhenia was, the sound of footsteps and echoing stone lingered longer than it should. Thus her memory of how her first period happened was stamped with the sonority of the morning street all a-chatter sweeping fresh into the house and lingering on the stairs, with that French governess, the housemaid and the doctor, equal to two criminals and one initiate, all bathed in light and the chill air and the sonority of noisy feet marching and disarmed by it all.

.

It was April, warm and sunny. '*... your feet, wipe your feet ...*' rang the bare, bright corridor, from end to end. The bearskins put away for the summer. Each room at morning rising clean, transformed, with sweet sighs of relief. All day, all the wearisomely, never-setting, endlessly bogged-in day, in

every corner of all the rooms, over the window-panes leant against the walls, in the mirrors, in vodka glasses of water and in the blue atmosphere of the garden, never enough, never quenched, with twinkling radiant countenance laughed and danced the wild cherry blossom and the honeysuckle caught its breath and bubbled. For a whole day and night now there had been that tiresome chatter of the courtyards, throughout the livelong day with tinkling tiny voices declaring night overthrown, and from time to time welled loud like decoctions of sunlight declaring that evenings were all abolished now and there would be no more sleeping.

'Your feet, your feet!'

But those feet were hot with speed, coming in bacchanalian from the outer air, with ringing in the ears, whereby they could not clearly catch anything that was said, but rushed into the dining-room at top speed to gulp and to gobble, then with a clatter of thrust-back chairs to race out again into that day, soaring free-breaking beyond supper, where the drying tree gave out its brittle sound and the blue sky shrieked its whispered secret and the soil gleamed richly as if all melted down. The borderline 'twixt house and outer air worn thin. Floors, creaking floors, the polish gleaming dry, never all wiped clean.

Her father had brought dainties and wonders. The whole house was wonderfully happy. Stones with dewy rustle forewarned of their emergence from many-hued cigarette paper, ever and ever more transparent, layer after layer, white and soft as lint, as those parcels were undone. Some were like drops of milk of almonds, others—splashes of sky-blue water-colour, yet others—congealed tears of cheese. These were blind, sleepy, pensive, these others, with dancing sparks, the frozen juice of blood oranges. One was afraid even to touch them. They were so fine on that paper foam which extruded them as a ripe plum its sultry nectar.

Father was now unusually kind to the children and often took mother into town. And they would return together, and seemed so happy. But what was most important was that they were both so calm, both in the same mood, and both so easy and kind, and when sometimes mother stole a glance at him

with a whimsical scolding word it looked just as if she dipped into his eyes, which were small and ugly, and scooped peace out of them, to pour it out again with her own, so big and so lovely, all over the children and everybody else.

On one occasion her parents got up very late. Later, Zhenia had no idea why, they decided to have dinner on a steamer moored in the harbour and they took the children with them. They let Seriozha try a sip of iced beer. They all enjoyed it so that they went to lunch on a steamer another time. The children found their parents unrecognizable. Whatever had come over them? The little girl lived in uncomprehending bliss, it seemed to her life would be like that now for ever and ever. They were not at all sad when they were told that this summer they were not being taken to a chalet. Their father went away soon after that. Three travelling chests appeared in the house. They were huge, yellow chests with stout iron bands round them.

III

The train left late at night. Mr Lüvers had gone a month ahead, and now wrote that the flat was ready. A lot of cabs went rattling down to the station. You could see when the station was near by the colour of the cobbles. They turned black and the street lamps looked like rusty iron. At the same time there was suddenly a view of the Kama, from a viaduct, where beneath them a gulf ran thundering out, black as soot, all heavy weights and clatter. The gulf shot away like an arrow into the far distance where it took fright, unrolling and all a-tremble with the twinkling tiny beads of signalling distances.

It was windy. The outlines flew off the hutments and fencing like the frames flying off sieves, flickering and flapping in the tattered air, and there was a smell of boiled potatoes. Their driver pulled out of the succession of basket trunks and bobbing up and down hindquarters and began to overtake them all. They recognized the wagon with their own luggage a long way off. When they drew level, from the driver's seat Ouliasha yelled something to her mistress, but the clatter of

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the wheels drowned the words. She went on bobbing up and down in her seat, her voice bobbed up and down too.

The little girl did not notice any sadness because of the novelty of all these night noises and the blacknesses and the freshness. Far, far ahead something loomed black that she could not make out. Beyond the harbour buildings little lights were swaying as the town plucked them off the river bank and off the boats and dipped them in the water. Then there were suddenly such a lot of them, all thick packed, blind, like maggots. In the Liubimovsky docks the funnels and the warehouse roofs and the decks showed blue and there were barges sprawling there, staring up at the stars.

'This place is a rat warren,' Zhenia said to herself.

All round them were the white stevedores. Seriozha jumped down first. He looked all round him and was most surprised when he saw that the truck with their luggage was also there—the horse raised its muzzle, the muzzle turned into a trunk, the horse reared on its hind legs like a barn-door cock, heaved its hindquarters against the truck and the truck moved back. All the way his one thought had been how much they would be left behind! And he stood now in his neat little white school-boy's tunic, suddenly completely absorbed by the nearness of their journey. The journey was a novelty for them both. But he already knew—and loved—the words: *warehouse, locomotives, sidings, through-coach*. And the sound of the word *class* was sour-sweet to him. His sister was interested in all this too, but in her own way, without the boyish system which distinguished her brother's enthusiasm.

All at once there was their mother, at their very side, springing out of the ground. Orders were given to take the children to the restaurant. And when they got there, there she was again, making her way through the crowd, floating proudly like a peahen, and made straight for the person who, for the first time in the great outer world, they heard called by that sonorous and impressive title: *station-master*. How often they were to hear it later, in how many places, in how many forms, and amid all sorts of crowds!

Overcome by yawns, they sat for a long time at one of the

windows. The windows were all so dusty, so clumsy and so big that they seemed like institutions made of bottle glass in which you had to take your hat off. And now the little girl saw that on the far side of the window there was no street at all, instead, there was another room, only it was a more serious, more dismal room than this one inside the glass bottle. Into that room came locomotives. They crept in very slowly, then they came to a stop and made everything dark. When they went away again, emptying the room, it did not look like a room at all, because you could see the sky beyond some slender pillars, and beyond the sky a hill and some wooden houses, and everybody was making his way in that direction, afar off. Perhaps the cock birds were crowing there now, and there was a water-tank and it made a frightful mess. . . .

This was a country railway station. There was none of the confusion or the glow of a big city station; all its people collected in good time, coming out of the town by night, not just to travel, but also to have a long wait—a station with peace and quiet in it and people migrating to other parts, who slept about on the floor with gun-dogs and wooden travelling chests and machines sewn into tarpaulins and bicycles stark naked.

They went to bed in the top bunk. The boy fell asleep at once. And still the train had not started. It was beginning to get light, and little by little it became clear to the little girl that the railway coach was blue, clean and cool . . . gradually it became clear to her. . . . But then she was already asleep, too.

.

It was a very stout man. He was reading a newspaper. And jolting. When you looked at him you became aware of that jolting with which everything in the compartment was soaked and splashed as it was with the sunshine. From above Zhenia examined the man with that leisurely, detailed examination with which one thinks about anything or looks at anything when one has quite wakened up and is quite fresh and merely staying in bed because one is waiting for the decision to get up to come all by itself, clear and unforced, without any help

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like one's other thoughts. She examined him and wondered wherever he had come from and why he was in the compartment with them and however he had found the time to get washed and dressed? She had no notion what the time really was. She had just wakened up, therefore it was morning. She examined the man, but he could not examine her. Her bunk sloped right back to the wall. He could not see her also because, on account of the news, he very rarely looked up or down or to either side, but even when he did raise his eyes towards her bunk, their glances did not meet, he either saw only the mattress or else . . . but here, very quickly, she tucked them in under her and pulled her stockings up tight; they were coming down. Mamma was in the corner underneath. She was properly dressed and reading a book. So Zhenia decided by reflection while she studied the fat man. But there was no sign of Seriozha, even down below. So wherever could he be? She relaxed into a glorious yawn and stretched. It was terribly hot. That she only now realized, peering over her head at the window, which was half down.

'But wherever is the ground?' she suddenly wondered, with alarm.

What she saw was indescribable. The noisy hazel wood into which their train had thrust like a snake had become an ocean, a world, anything, everything. Dazzling, rolling away down a slope, it raced past, far-flung and steep-falling, till afar off it became tiny and close-packed and hazy where it broke away straight down, there turning quite black, while what was suspended in the space beyond the gulf was like an enormous, wondrous thundercloud, all curls and whorls of blazing green, and this stood absolutely still, like stone, and was lost in thought. Zhenia held her breath. She felt immediately how swift was that carefree, utterly carried-away air, and it was at once clear to her that that thundercloud was some special sort of country or place with a reverberating mountainous name which cannonaded all round with the rocks and the sand which were cast down to the valley below, and it was only the hazel wood that knew this, whispering and whispering it, here and there and far, far away beyond, only the hazel wood.

And she leant over and asked the whole compartment:
 "Is that—the Ural Mountains?"

.

All the rest of the journey she spent glued to the corridor window. She took root at it and she kept sticking her head out. Greedy for it all. She had discovered that it was nicer looking back than ahead. Grandiose acquaintances receded into the mists. After brief separation from them, while you sought them out again, with precipitous rumble and rattling of chains which sent a wave of icy air over the nape of your neck and then they produced a new wonder right under your nose! The alpine panorama parted to either side, and everything grew taller and vaster. Some became black, others became brighter, some obscured themselves, others obscured yet others as they came together and separated again, going down to the depths, and rising again.

All this took place in a slow, slow revolution, like the circumambulation of the stars, with all the cautious restraint of things gigantic, ever within a hair's breadth of catastrophe, yet ever ensuring that the world was quite intact. And all these complex transpositions were directed by a tremendous, never fluctuating booming which the human ear could never hear, but which saw everything. Gloomy and taciturn, that booming swept them all with its eagle eye and inspected their grand parade. That was how the Ural Mountains were organized, mile after mile of them, and then reorganized.

Squinting because of the brilliant light, she went back into the compartment for a moment. Mamma was talking to the strange gentleman. She was laughing. Seriozha was swinging about on the red plush from a leather belt fastened to the wall. Mamma spat out the last stone into her palm, shook fallen crumbs off her dress, then, bending down with swift and nimble ease, tucked all the rubbish away under the seat.

Contrary to expectation, the stout gentleman had a husky, pipy little voice, and clearly suffered from shortness of breath. Mamma introduced him to Zhenia and gave her a mandarin.

He was a comical man, no doubt kind too, and when he talked he kept putting his chubby hand up to his mouth. Whatever he said swelled up big, but was always being suddenly interrupted and washed away. It seemed that he really came from Ekaterinburg, he had travelled all over the Urals and he knew that country very well, and when he produced a gold watch from his waistcoat pocket and put it right up against his nose, then tucked it back into his pocket again, Zhenia noticed what kind fingers he had. Like all fat people, he took things as if he were giving and his hand was always sighing, just as if he were offering it to be kissed, and it bounced softly, like a rubber ball on the floor.

"Not long now," he suddenly drawled. He squinted and talked out of the side of his mouth, sideways from the boy, though it was to him he was talking, then he puffed out his lips.

"Do you know there's a post," Seriozha interrupted, slipping down from the seat and running out into the corridor. "That's what they say. There's a post where Asia and Europe meet. And it's got ASIA written upon it!"

Zhenia simply did not understand, but when the fat man had explained to her what it was all about, she too ran to the same side of the train, to wait for that post, all afraid they had already slipped past it. In her enchanted brain *'where Asia and Europe meet'* rose up in the form of a strange, phantasmagoric barrier, no doubt like those iron bars which were put between people and the puma cage—a barrier of terrible, foul-smelling dangerousness, as black as midnight. She awaited that post as if it were the raising of the curtain on the first act of a tragedy of geography of which she had heard stories from onlookers and proud too and excited to be in on it and soon about to see it for herself.

Meanwhile the wonder which previously to this had prompted her to join the grown-ups in the compartment, continued monotonously, till it looked as if there never would be an end to the grey alder forest through which half an hour earlier the railroad had begun to make its way and nature just made no preparation at all for what was about to happen to it. And

Zhenia got quite annoyed with dull, dusty old Europe for so clumsily postponing the commencement of the wonder. Then how put out she was when, as if in answer to a wild shriek from Seriozha, something rather like a tombstone flashed by the window. It turned sideways to them and then ran away, bearing that long-awaited fabulous legend away with it, deep into the alder, as it ran away from the alder tree which was pursuing it. In the same instant, as if by pre-arrangement, countless heads were thrust out of the windows of all classes and the train rushing down the slope in a cloud of dust came to new life, and Asia already had dozens of lanes to its credit. But there were still kerchiefs fluttering from flying heads and men exchanging glances and some were clean-shaven and some were bearded and they all flew on in clouds of whirling sand, flying and flying on still past the same dusty alders which so recently were European but now were all so very Asian.

IV

A new life began. Milk was not brought round to the kitchen door by a milk-woman, but fetched by Ouliasha, and she carried it in a pair of earthenware crocks, too, and there were special rolls, not like the rolls in Perm at all. Here the sidewalks were something between marble and alabaster, all polished watery shiny. Even in the shade the flagstones dazzled, they were like icy suns, and they thirstily absorbed the shadows of the neighbouring trees, which melted away on them, getting quite watery and thin. Here it was also quite different going out and about, the streets were broad and bright, with flower beds, 'like Paris,' Zhenia said, copying her father.

He said so the very day they arrived. It was all very lovely and spacious. Father had had something to eat before coming to the station and did not dine with them. His knife, fork and spoon stayed as clean and bright as Ekaterinburg was. He merely undid his napkin, then he lolled sideways, telling them about things. He unbuttoned his waistcoat and his shirt-front stuck out so fresh and powerful. He told them that this was a

lovely European town and rang a bell when they were to clear empty plates away and bring some more food and he kept on ringing and talking. And by unknown passages from rooms to Zhenia still unknown a white maid came silently in, all starchy-crinkly white and black too, and they spoke to her in the plural and said 'you' to her, and though new she smiled at the mistress and the children as if they already knew each other. And she was given some instructions about Ouliasha, who was out there in the unfamiliar and probably very, very dark kitchen where no doubt there was a window out of which you could see something new, a church tower perhaps, or a street or some birds. And no doubt Ouliasha was there at this very minute asking that young lady the maid questions and putting on some of her old clothes ready to unpack later, asking questions and settling in and looking to see what corner the stove was in, whether it was in the same corner as in Perm or in some other corner.

The boy learned from his father that it was not far to walk to the lycée, it was quite near, and they must have seen it when they drove past. Father drank some Caucasian mineral water and when he had gulped it down he went on:

"Didn't I show you? Well, you can't see it from here. But perhaps you can from the kitchen," he added reflectively, "though no more than the roof."

Then he drank some more *Narzan* water and rang the bell.

The kitchen turned out to be bright, fresh, exactly—so it seemed a minute later—like what she had guessed it would be in the dining-room, with all she had imagined, a hearth of white and pale blue tiles, and two windows just as she had thought there would be. Ouliasha wrapped something round her bare arms, the room filled full with children's voices, there were men on the lycée roof and the top of scaffold poles sticking over it.

"Yes, it's being repaired," her father said, when, jostling each other and making a great noise, they all went back to the dining-room, by the corridor too, which now she knew though she did not yet know it well, but would have to explore it properly tomorrow, when she got out her exercise books and

had hung her glove-flannel up by its loop, in short, when she had finished the thousand-and-one things she had to do.

"Ex-quisite butter," her mother said, as she sat down, and they went to the schoolroom, which they had been to see before they took their fur caps off, as soon as they arrived.

"What makes this Asia?" she wondered, out loud.

But for some reason Seriozha just did not understand the question, which it was certain sure he would have understood at any other time. Till now he and she had shared everything. But now he rolled across to a map which was hanging on the wall and just swept one hand from top to bottom down the 'Ural Mountain Range', then shot her a glance, assuming her to be absolutely crushed by that argument.

To her mind suddenly came that event which had happened at noon. It was already so far away. It was quite impossible to credit that the day which contained all that was the same day that was 'today in Ekaterinburg' and still was, not all of it yet, of course, there was still more to come. But when she reflected that all that had slipped away behind her, in all its stupendous shape, into an appointed distance of its own, she experienced a sense of amazing spiritual exhaustion, the sort of exhaustion that her body felt as evening dragged on after a day of great effort. It was just as if she herself had taken part in the discovery and moving into place of those oh-so-heavy but lovely things and had strained herself. And being for some reason convinced that *they*, her Ural Mountains, were *there*, she spun round and raced away through the dining-room into the kitchen, where there was now less crockery, though that ex-quisite butter was still there with the ice on maple leaves all beady with sweat, and so was the angry mineral water.

The lycée was being done out, and the air was torn by strident swifts just like dressmakers tearing madapollam with their teeth and down below—she had stuck her head out—there was a gleaming carriage at an open stable door and sparks flying from a grindstone and the smell of all they had had for dinner, and it was better and more interesting than when it was served and it smelt melancholy for a long time like in a book. She had forgotten now what she had come here for and

did not notice that her Urals were not in Ekaterinburg, but what she did notice was how gradually it grew dark in Ekaterinburg, taking objects sedately one by one, and beneath them workpeople were singing; it must be very light work, no doubt they had washed the floor now, and were rolling the mats into position with their hot hands and they just tipped out the water from the washing-up bowl and although they sloshed it down like that it was so quiet all round! She noticed too how the water-tap gurgled, and how 'See, Miss'—but she was still shy of the wonderful new maid and did not mean to pay any attention to her, and she noticed—she did try to think her thought out to the very end—that down beneath them people knew and no doubt were saying:

"See, that's the new folk come to number two."

Ouliasha came into the kitchen.

The children slept soundly this first night, and Seriozha woke up in Ekaterinburg, but Zhenia woke up in Asia, so it seemed to her, again so wide and so strange. On the ceiling freshly danced the flaky alabaster.

.

It had begun in the summer. She was suddenly notified that she would go to the lycée. That was all that was delightful. But they notified her. She did not ask her teacher to come to the schoolroom, where the hues of the sunshine stuck so firmly to the walls with their glue-paint wash that it was only with blood that the evening could tear off the past day, it stuck so. She had not asked him, but in he came, together with mamma, to meet 'his future pupil'. She did not give him that ugly surname Dikikh. And was it ever her wish that from now on there were always soldiers drilling at midday, all stiff and greedy and sweaty, like the red water-hammer of the tap when something was wrong with the pipes, or for their boots to be absolutely crushed by the purple storm-cloud which knew all about guns and wheels, so much more than their white shirts and white handkerchiefs and whitest of officers?

And was it by any request of hers that now invariably two

things—a plate and a table napkin—coming into contact, like the carbon pencils in an arc-lamp, should immediately cause a third thing which tended to dematerialize the notion of death, like that sign hanging out at the barber's, where this first happened to her. And was it with her consent that those barricades 'prohibiting loitering' should become the scene of certain town secrets which against all the regulations did loiter, or that the Chinese should become personally frightful, her very own, and terrible?

Of course, she did not take everything so heavily to heart. Quite a lot, such as her forthcoming going to the lycée, was pleasant. But, just like going to the lycée, all the rest of it was all *notified*. Life had ceased to be a poetic trifle, it had plunged into a stern, sombre fable inasmuch as it became prose and fact. And the elements of everyday existence made a sullen, a painful, a sombre impact on that soul which was thus getting involved in life, and it was just as if she were for ever turning from intoxication to a sober state.

All these things sank at once to the bottom of her soul, real things, things hardened off, things chill like sleepy leaden spoons. And there, at the very bottom, that lead began to float about, and it ran into little clots, dripping out in ideas that haunted her.

V

Some Belgians became frequent visitors at tea-time. That was what they were called—'the Belgians'. That was what her father called them. He would say: "The Belgians are coming round today." There were four of them. The one without any whiskers did not come very often. He was not talkative. Sometimes he came alone, just dropping in, on weekdays, always choosing bad, rainy weather. The other three were inseparables. Their faces were like cakes of fresh soap, soap not started, soap straight out of its wrappings, sweet-scented and chill. One had a beard which was thick and tufty and he also had tufty chestnut hair. They invariably came with her father, straight from some sort of 'meeting'.

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The whole household was fond of them. They talked as if they were pouring water on the tablecloth, noisily, freshly, suddenly, and somehow all to one side, where nobody expected it to be, and you could always hear the consequences of their jokes and stories a long time after, they were always comprehensible to the children, always thirst-quenching and clean.

The din collected all round, the sugar-bowl gleamed, the nickel-plated coffee-jug, the clean white teeth, the solid linen. They would banter politely and graciously with mamma. Colleagues of her father, they possessed a subtle ability to restrain him just in time when in response to some frivolous hint of theirs or allusion to business or to personalities which only they among the company at table understood, her father ponderously, in not at all the best French, began a lengthy, stumbling story about counter-agents and *références approuvées*, and about *férocités*, that is to say, *bestialités, ce qui veut dire en Russe*—which in Russian meant kidnapping during Holy Week.

The one without any whiskers, who latterly had started learning Russian, often tested himself out in that new field, but he still did not catch on. It was hardly seemly to laugh at her father's French, indeed, they found all his *férocités* very tiresome, but the matter seemed to be put right by the laughter which Negarat's attempts produced.

That was his name—Negarat. He was a Walloon from the Flemish part of Belgium. Introduced by Dikikh. He had noted his address down in Russian, and he made the complicated letters, such as *ю*, *я* and *ѣ* very funnily. They always turned out somehow double, straggling, splitting in two. The children took the liberty of kneeling on the leather armchair cushions and putting their elbows on the table. Everything indeed became permissible, everything got mixed up, *ю* was not *ю*, but a sort of *ю*, the whole company round the table roared and chortled, Evans banging the table with his fist and wiping away the tears, her father shaking with laughter and pacing up and down the room, crumpling his handkerchief, red-faced and declaring that no, this was really too much.

"*Faites de nouveau*," Evans egged him on. "*Commencez*."

But Negarat hesitated, just like a little rabbit, gaping there, puzzling out however he was going to get to know that Russian *и*, as dark and obscure a region of the world as any colony of the Congo.

"*Dites les mots: 'ouvoui, nevouigodno'*," said her father, in a choking voice, quite hoarse, "Say in Russian, 'I'm very sorry, it's awkward'."

"*Ouvoui niévoui . . .*" the Belgian began.

"Do you hear that? Isn't it delightful?"

And they all mimicked him and all roared with laughter.

.

The summer passed. The examinations were taken and she had passed, some subjects with distinction. The chilly, transparent noise of the corridors streamed away like water out of a spring. Here everybody knew everybody. The leaves in the garden were turning yellow and gold. The classroom window-panes were dimmed by that bright, dancing reflection. Frosted half-way, they grew misty, and the lower part trembled. A bluish shudder ran through the casements. Their icy clarity was furrowed by the bronze twigs of the maples.

She had never realized that all her anxieties were going to be transformed into such a funny thing as that! *Divide such and such a number into arshins 7!* Now, was it really worth going through all the measures just for that? All those grammes and drachmas and scruples and ounces, which had always seemed to her to be the four quarters of the scorpion. Why should one have to use 'e' when one wrote *polezny* (useful), why 'e' and not that 'ѣ'? She only tried to give an answer because her whole mind concentrated on the effort to conceive such unsatisfactory reasons, by reason of which such a thing as a word *polѣzny* could ever exist at all, it looked so essentially funny and so shaggy too when one outlined it like that.

And she never did know why even so she was not sent to the lycée after all, despite being accepted and entered in the register, and her coffee-coloured uniform already being made

and she even having a fitting with pins, so tiresome that was and lasted so long too, and in her room new horizons forming, such as her satchel, her pen-case, her luncheon basket, and a really horrible photograph of herself.

THE STRANGER

I

THE little Tartar girl was wrapped from head to knees in a thick woollen shawl and kept trotting about the yard like a tiny hen. Zhenia felt she would like to go and talk to that little Tartar girl. At which moment the shutters of the little window banged open and Axinia called "Nickiel!" The child, like a peasant's bundle with felt slippers roughly stuffed into the bottom, toddled quickly over to the *concierge's* little quarters.

Taking work outdoors always meant blunting any foot-note to a rule till it lost all sense and then going upstairs to begin all over again indoors. Indoors, as soon as you crossed the threshold, took possession of you with a special kind of gloom and coolness; there was always a special kind of quiet, unexpected familiarity, as if there each piece of furniture stood in a place that was allotted to it for all time. Nobody could foretell the future. But you could *see* it when you passed from the open inside; its plan was at once clear—that disposition to which, for all its unsubmitiveness in every other respect, it was bound to submit. And there was never a dream, wafted by the stir of the outer air, but that cheerful, decisive spirit of the house quickly shook it off the moment she entered the hall.

This time it was Lermontov. Zhenia crumpled the little volume, covers folded inside. Indoors if her brother Seriozha had done that she would have been the first to attack such a 'disgusting habit'. Outside it was different.

Prokhor put the ice-cream machine down and went back into the house. When he opened the door of the Spitzyns' flat

the infernal yelping of the General's hairless little puppies came gambolling out. Then the door banged to with a sharp clang.

But the river Terek, lioness-like leaping, with that shaggy mane on her back, still roared away, as appointed, only Zhenia suddenly became a prey to doubts whether all that took place on the Terek's back or on its neck. She was too lazy to check it in the book, and the golden clouds from southern countries, from afar, had scarcely managed to guide the poet to the north, when there they were meeting her at the door of General Spitzyn's kitchen, with a bucket and mop in their hands.

The batman put down the bucket and bent down, took the ice-cream machine to pieces, and set about washing it. The August sun brushed its way past the foliage of the trees and fell on the batman's rump; it settled red in the faded army cloth and soaked into it like turpentine.

The courtyard was large with all sorts of odd corners. A courtyard both whimsical and oppressive. In the centre it had once been paved, but never re-paved, and the cobbles were thickly covered with a curly, low-growing weed which in the afternoons, after the midday meal, gave out a sour, medicinal sort of odour such as hovers around hospitals on hot days. For a short distance, between the porter's quarters and the carriage shed, the yard adjoined somebody else's garden.

It was here, behind the wood-pile, Zhenia made her way. She propped up the ladder from underneath with a flat log, wriggled it firm against the log-pile, which would give way, and then seated herself, uncomfortably but very interestingly, on the middle rung, like in a yard game. Then she got up and climbed still higher and rested her book on the top rung, which was broken, and thought now she really would read *The Demon*; then, finding that the first place was the best to sit, she went down again, forgetting her book on the top of the pile. She forgot about it altogether because it was only now that she suddenly noticed something on the other side of the garden which she had never thought was there, and she gaped, enchanted.

There were no bushes in this other garden, and the ancient trees raised their lower branches up into the mass of leaves as

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if up into a kind of night, leaving the garden below stripped naked, although it was always in a half-light, an airy, triumphant half-light, from which it never escaped. Those forked, thunder-blue limbs, grey blotched with lichen, permitted a full view of the deserted, unused little alley on to which that other garden opened. There was a yellow dogwood. The shrubbery was now dried up, shrivelled, the leaves fallen.

Thus translated by the gloomy garden into a new world, she saw the silent little alley beyond lit like events in a dream; that is, brilliant in detail but all very silent, as if there the sun had put on spectacles and was scrabbling about like a stupid old hen.

But what made Zhenia gape? Her discovery, more interesting to her than the people by whose help she made it.

There must be a shop there—outside the gate, in the street. And what a street! 'Lucky ones!' She was envious of the stranger girls. They were three in number.

They stood out black as the words 'fair captive' in the poem. Three even heads, back view, hair neat under round hats, were bent over something, as if the end one, half hidden by a tree trunk, was leaning on something else, asleep, and the others were asleep too, leaning on her. Their hats were blackish-grey-blue and the sunlight played on them in little spots like insects. They had black ribbons. Then the three strange girls turned their heads the other way. No doubt something in the street that way drew their attention. They spent a minute looking that other way, just as you look in summer when for a moment everything is dissolved by the light and lengthened so that you have to screw up your eyes and shield them with your hand—for that sort of minute they looked, then fell back to their former state of corporate drowsiness.

Zhenia would have gone home then, but when she felt for her book she could not recall at first where she had left it. She went back for it, and when she had climbed on to the wood-pile she saw that the three had got up and were going away. One after another they made their way to the gate. At their heels went a smallish man, walking with a limp. Under his arm he carried a huge book or atlas. So that was what they had been doing, peering over each other's shoulders. And she

had thought they were asleep. They crossed the garden and disappeared behind the outhouses. The sun was now nearly set. Getting her book Zhenia disturbed a log. The wood-pile came to life and the whole thing moved as if it were alive. A few logs rolled right down and ended up on the turf with a dull thump. It served as signal, like a watchman's rattle. Evening was now born, and with evening a host of sounds, tiny, haze-wrapped. The air began to pick out an old-time tune, a half whistle, from over the river.

The yard was empty. Prokhor had finished his work. He went out of the gateway, where, quite low down, right on the grass, like a sheet, was outspread the sad, reedy tinkle of a soldier's balalaika. Over it twirled and danced, broke away and fell, dissolved in the air, fell and dissolved, fell, and then before touching the earth soared high again, a thin, quiet swarm of midges. But the tinkle of the balalaika was even thinner, even quieter, swept lower towards the earth than the midges, and yet was clean of the dust, and better, more aery, than the swarm, sweeping high again, twinkling and breaking in the air, ever swooping, leisurely.

Zhenia went on her way indoors. 'Lame,' she said to herself—thinking of the stranger with the album—'lame, but a gentleman, no crutches.' She went the back way. The yard air held the persistent, pungent aroma of camomile. 'Lately Mummy's got a whole chemist's shop of little blue bottles with yellow labels.' Slowly she made her way up the steps. The iron railing was cold. Her feet shuffled and the steps creaked in answer. All of a sudden an extraordinary thought came into her head. She had just stepped two stairs at once, and now stood still on a third. What came into her head was that lately some intangible resemblance had appeared between her mother and the porter's wife. Something she simply could not make out. She stood still. It was something like—she thought of what—was it like what people meant when they said "We are all human . . ." or "We're all anointed with the same myrrh . . ." or "Fate doesn't distinguish blood . . ."? There was a little bottle on the stair and she pushed it away with her toe, and the bottle went down and fell onto the dusty matting without

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breaking. Anyway, something that was very, very, very common to all people. But if that was so, why was there not the same resemblance between herself and Axinia, or, say Axinia and Ouliasha? It seemed to Zhenia the more strange since it was difficult to find two people more unlike. Axinia had something earthy in her, like gardens, reminding you of potato clumps, or the greenery of wild pumpkins, whereas Mummy . . . The very thought of that comparison brought a scornful smile to Zhenia's lips.

Nevertheless it was Axinia and no one else who set the tone of that insistent comparison. She got the best of it too. The peasant wench gained nothing, but the *lady* did lose. For a brief space there was a very wild notion in Zhenia's mind: it occurred to her that some sort of elemental principle of the common people had entered her mother, and she imagined her mother even speaking with a vulgar accent and verbs all wrong; and could suddenly see the day coming when Mummy in her new silk gown, but beltless, like a barge, would be arms akimbo talking about "akeepin' t'doorpaost up!"

The passage reeked of medicine. Zhenia went straight to her father.

II

The house was redecorated, and luxury appeared. The Lüvers invested in a carriage and kept horses. The coachman's name was Davletsha.

At that time rubber tyres were the very latest. When they drove out everything turned round to stare at them: people, fences, church towers, barn-door cocks.

At the doctor's they were a long time opening the door to Mrs Lüvers, and when out of respect for her the carriage moved off slowly, she called after them "Don't go a long way, as far as the railway crossing and back; and take care on the hill," while, removing her from the doctor's doorstep, the pallid sun continued on its way down the street, reaching Davletsha's taut, florid, freckly neck, warming it up and making the little hairs stand on end.

They drove on to the bridge, and the chatter of its loose cross-timbers rang out all round them, crafty and full and harmonious (put together who knew when, for all time) cut short with all piety by the ravine beneath the bridge—by the never-forgettable sound of noon, of sleep.

Climbing the hill that overfed animal Vykormysh stumbled for foothold on the slippery, unyielding flint; he strained his withers, it was more than he could manage, and suddenly, in the scramble, reminiscent of a sprawling grasshopper, he became dazzlingly beautiful in the futility of his unnatural efforts, just as grasshoppers are aerial creatures by nature, and it seemed that any moment his patience would give out and with a furious flutter of wings he would soar away. And so he did. Up went his front legs and he was off over the vacant ground at a canter, with Davletsha trying to hold him in by tugging at the reins. A dog added its ragged, shaggy, uncomprehending bark, and the dust was like gunpowder. The road turned sharply to the left.

The black street ended blindly in the red wall of the railway goods depot. It was all alarm. The sun was slanting and wrapped round the crowd of strange figures in peasant blouses. The sun wrapped them in a stinging white light, which seemed to splash all over them as if somebody's jackboot had tipped over a bucket of thin mortar which was flooding over the ground. The street was all alarm. The horse was going at walking pace.

"Turn to the right," Zhenia ordered.

"We shan't be able to get through," Davletsha answered, and pointed with his huge whip to the red wall. "It's a blind alley."

"Then stop, I'll have a look."

"Those are our Chinese."

"So I see."

When Davletsha saw that the young lady was not going to discuss it with him, he gave a long-drawn-out sort of 'tprrrrou', and the horse stopped as if frozen to the ground, all a-quiver. Then Davletsha set up a thin broken whistle, all little gushes and pauses, as fitted the moment.

The Chinese ran across the road with huge rye loaves in their hands. They were dressed in blue, like women in trousers.

Their bare heads ended in knots on the nape, and looked as if they were made of twisted-up handkerchiefs. Some of them stopped to watch, and Zhenia could look at those properly. Their faces were pale, earthen, grinning. They were sun-tanned and dirty, like brass oxidised by poverty. Davletsha took out his pouch and began to roll. And then from round the corner—from where the Chinese were making for—a number of women appeared. Also going for bread no doubt. Those in the road began guffawing, making their way up to them, with their hands behind their backs, as if pinnioned there. Their wriggling movements were exaggerated by their being dressed, like acrobats, from head to heel in some kind of single garment. There was nothing really alarming in it; the women did not run away, but they too stopped, and laughed.

"Listen, Davletsha, what are you thinking about!"

The horse had dashed off—dashed off. He won't stand still, eh, won't stand still—and Davletsha tugged and shouted and lashed the horse with the reins.

"Steady there, you'll tip me out. What are you lashing him like that for?"

"I must."

And only when they had got out into the fields and the horse had quieted down—it had begun to dance madly—the crafty Tartar, having sped the young lady like an arrow from a shameful sight, took the reins in his right hand and tucked the pouch—which he had been holding all that time—back into the skirt of his coat.

They went back by another road. Mrs Lüvers had seen them, from the doctor's little window, no doubt. She came out on to the porch at the very instant that the bridge, which had already told them its story, started it all over again as the water-cart reached it.

III

With Liza Defendov, the girl who brought into class rowan berries gathered on the way to school, Zhenia made friends during one of the examinations. The daughter of the sacristan was

being re-examined in French, having failed first time. *Lüvers*, *Zhenia* was told to sit in the nearest empty place. Thus, sitting together at the same phrases, they made each other's acquaintance . . .

"*Est-ce Pierre qui a volé la pomme?*"

"*Oui, c'est Pierre qui vola, etc. . . .*"

And the acquaintanceship was not ended by the fact that *Zhenia* was taught at home. They began to meet each other. Their meetings, by mercy of her mother's overseeing eye, were one-sided. *Liza* was allowed to come to them, but so far *Zhenia* was not allowed to go to the *Defendovs*'.

The spasmodic nature of their meetings did not prevent *Zhenia* rapidly becoming very attached to her friend. She fell in love with her, that is to say, she became the suffering party in the relationship, the manometer, watchful and feverishly sensitive in the quivering of its needle. Every single mention *Liza* made of her class-mates, none of whom *Zhenia* knew, awakened in her sensations of desertion and gall. Her heart would sink. First intimations of jealousy. Without any reason for it, simply by force of her mistrustful conviction that *Liza*, outwardly so direct, but in her heart of hearts scornful of all in *Zhenia* that was *Lüvers*, was deceiving her, and behind her back, in school or at home, making mock of it—this *Zhenia* accepted as something which should be, implicit in the very nature of affection. Her feelings were as random in choice of object as could satisfy the imperative demands of that basic instinct which knows no self-love but solely the suffering and self-immolation that one sacrifices to any fetish when one first experiences it.

Neither *Zhenia* nor *Liza* had the least influence one on the other, but met and parted unchanged, one passionately feeling, the other feeling naught.

The father of the *Akhmedianovs* traded in iron. In the year between the birth of *Nouretdin* and *Smagil* he unexpectedly made money, and then *Smagil* was called *Samoilo* and the

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boys were to be brought up as Russians. Papa did not omit one single trait of the 'good old' devil-may-care Russian landowner mode of life, and did more than his bit in ten years' wild living in every direction. The children got on magnificently, that is, took after that fine example and inherited Papa's devil-may-care ways, loud, dashing, like a pair of flywheels set going and then left to the mercy of inertia. The most perfect fourth-form boys of all were the Akhmedianov brothers—a hurly-burly of crumbling chalk, shavings, gun-shot, thundering desks, indecent swear-words and snub-nosed, rosy-cheeked, frost-chapped impudence. Seriozha made friends with them in August. By the end of September the boy was quite shameless. Quite normal. Being a typical schoolboy and also a somebody besides, meant being in tow with the Akhmedianovs. And there was nothing Seriozha wanted more than to be a thorough-going schoolboy. Luvers made no attempt to prevent his son's friendship. He noticed no change in him, or if he did notice anything, ascribed it to puberty. Besides, his head was full of other cares. It was about that time that he discovered he was ill, and that his illness was incurable.

IV

She was not sorry for him exactly, though nobody else had anything to say but how extraordinarily untimely it was and aggravating. Negarat was too spry even for Zhenia's parents and everything they felt about strangers was hazily communicated to the children too, as to spoiled pets. Zhenia was only grieved because things would not be as they used to be, and there would be no more of his laughter.

She happened to be at table the evening that he announced to her mother that he had to go to France, to Dijon, and do some kind of service. "Why, then, you must still be quite young," her mother said, and the flood-gates of her pity were immediately opened, while he sat there hanging his head. Conversation kept drying up. Her mother said: "The men are coming tomorrow to seal the windows," and she asked him if

he wouldn't like them shut now. He said no, the evening was warm, and in his country the windows weren't sealed up at all, even in mid-winter. Shortly after that her father turned up, and he too poured forth his regrets at the news. But before he began his wailing he did raise his eyebrows and ask in surprise:

"Dijon? But surely you are a Belgian, aren't you?"

"I am, but I am a French subject." And Negarat then told the story of his 'old folks' migration, so interestingly, as if he were not their son, with as much warmth indeed as if talking about some strangers he had read about in a book.

"Excuse me if I interrupt you a moment," her mother said. "Zhenia, my pet, all the same, do shut that window, there's a dear."

Then, to her father:

"Vika, the men are coming tomorrow to do them up. Do please go on. Whatever you say, that uncle of yours was a real old scoundrel. Do you mean to say he really did *swear* to it?"

"He did."

And he returned to his interrupted story. And when at last he reached the point, which was the paper he had received the preceding day by post from the Consulate, he guessed that the young lady could not make head or tail of it all, but was trying to, so he began explaining, but in such a way as not to show what he was doing in order not to touch her on the quick, explaining exactly what military service meant.

"Yes, yes, I understand. Yes, I understand, I do really," she assured him with mechanical gratitude.

"Why on earth go so far? Be a soldier here, that is to say," she corrected herself, "study where the others do"—and vividly saw in her imagination the green meadows spread out below the priory hill.

"Yes, yes, I understand. Yes I do," the girl went on, and Mr and Mrs Lüvers, sitting there out of it, and thinking that this Belgian was overloading the child's head with unnecessary detail, every now and then put in their sleepy simplifications. And suddenly came the minute when she felt sorry for all who had even long ago, or even quite recently, been Negarats in any distant place, and then bidding farewell all round, had set

out on that unwanted, unsought-for journey, to be soldiers in this alien city of Ekaterinburg. This man made it all so clear to her. Nobody hitherto had done this. A rush of heartlessness, a shattering rush of vividness, was stripped from her white-tent picture of regiments, tarnished now and turned into a collection of individual men in soldier's clothes, who became pitiable the very moment that this reasonability suddenly introduced into them brought them to life and elevated them, so that they ceased to be a colourful picture, but become merely near and dear ones.

Good-byes.

"I shall leave part of my books with Tzvetkov. That's the friend I have told you so much about. Please make use of them as hitherto, *Madame*. Your son knows where I live, he is often at my landlord's house, and I'm handing over my room to Tzvetkov. I shall tell him about the books."

"Tell him to come in and see us. Tzvetkov, you say his name is?"

"That's right, Tzvetkov."

"Tell him to come to see us. We shall make him welcome. When I was younger I knew . . ." and she shot a look at her husband, who was standing right against Negarat, his hands tucked under his close-fitting jacket, waiting for a convenient gap in this exchange of politenesses, so he might make a final arrangement with the Belgian about the next day.

"Yes, tell him he's to come to see us. Only not just now. I'll send him an invitation. Yes, take it, it's yours. I could not finish it. It made me cry so. The doctor advised me to stop reading it altogether. To avoid excitement." And once again she gave her husband a look. He lowered his face and with creaking collar, breathing heavily, began to peer down, very anxious to see if both his boots were on and then if both were well cleaned.

"So there we are. Well, well. Don't forget your stick. We shall see each other again, I trust."

"Why, of course, I don't leave till Friday. What day is it today?" He showed that sudden fright of people who are leaving.

"Wednesday. It is Wednesday, isn't it, Vika? Vika, it is Wednesday, isn't it?" And then her father at last got his edge in. "Wednesday . . . *Ecoutez, demain . . .*" and walked out to the landing with Negarat.

V

They strode on, talking, and from time to time she had to give a hop, skip and a run to keep up with Seriozha and get back in step with him. They were walking very fast, and her raincoat slipped down on her shoulders, because to help herself along she was working her arms, but she was also keeping her hands in her pockets. It was cold and the thin ice crackled merrily under her snow-shoes. They were on an errand for their mother—to buy a present for the man who was to go, and they were talking.

"So they were taking him to the station, were they?"

"Mhm!"

"But why was he sitting in straw?"

"How do you mean?"

"In the wagon. All in straw. Legs covered. People don't sit like that."

"I've already told you. Because he was a criminal."

"So they are taking him to hard labour?"

"No. To Perm. There's no prison department here. Watch where you tread."

They had to cross the street past the tinsmith's. All the summer the shop door had been wide open and Zhenia had grown accustomed to seeing the crossing dominated by that blast of general and friendly liveliness which the fierce gaping mouth of the workshop gave forth. All July, August and September, carts stopped outside it, blocking the crossing; peasants waited about, mainly Tatars; a confusion of buckets and guttering, broken and rusty. There more than anywhere the dense sun sank strangely into the dusk at the hour when over the next-door fence their neighbours cut the throats of young fowls; and as it sank, transformed the crowd to an

encampment and painted the Tatars like Gypsies. Front axle-trees, freed from the hooded wagons, their shafts smooth-worn by harness, cut hollows in the velvet dust.

The cauldrons and the scrap-iron were still there, left where they had fallen; only now patined with frost; but the doors were tightly closed, as if it was a holiday on account of the cold, and the crossing was a desert. Out of a round ventilation hole came Zhenia's familiar musty scent of burning metal, hissing noisily, acrid to her nostrils, only then settling on to her palate, prickly, like cheap lemonade.

"Is there a prison department in Perm then?"

"Yes. A Prison Board. I think we'd better go this way. It's nearer. There is one at Perm, because Perm's a government town, and Ekaterinburg is only a provincial centre. It's too small."

The path along past the villas was paved with red brick and bordered with shrubs. There were traces of the hazy and enfeebled sun on it. Seriozha walked as loudly as he could.

"If you tickle this berberis with a pin in the spring when it's flowering, it flutters all its leaves, just as if it were alive."

"I know."

"And you're afraid of being tickled aren't you?"

"Yes."

"That means you're highly-strung; the Akhmedianovs say that if anyone is afraid of being tickled . . ."

And on they went—Zhenia trotting, Seriozha striding with astounding strides, and her raincoat slipping down on her shoulders. They caught sight of Dikikh just as the wicket-gate, swinging on its post like a turnstile, held them up. They caught sight of him from a good distance. He had just come out of the very shop they were now half a block from. Dikikh was not alone; he was followed by a man of medrum height who tried to hide a slight limp as he walked. Zhenia could not help thinking she had seen that man somewhere before. They passed without greeting each other. The others cut across the street, and Dikikh did not notice the children. He had on high goloshes, and kept lifting up his arms with his fingers spread

wide. He *simply did not agree* and all ten fingers had to help prove that the other man . . . (But where was it she had seen that other man? A long time ago. But where? It must have been in Perm, *when she was a child.*)

"Wait a moment!" How annoying. Seriozha knelt down. "Just a second."

"Caught on a nail?"

"Of course. Idiots, don't even know how to knock a nail in properly!"

"All right?"

"Oh, do wait a moment. I can't find it. I know that fellow with the limp. Ah, there it is. Thank heaven."

"Torn it?"

"No, fortunately. That's an old hole in the lining. I didn't do that. Well, let's get on. Half a moment, just clean my knee. All right, come on."

"I know who it is. He lives in the Akhmedianovs' house. Where Negarat used to live. Do you remember I told you how people collect there and drink all night; you can see the light in their windows. Remember? Remember when I spent the night there? Samoilo's birthday. Well, one of those. Remember?"

Yes, she remembered. She saw she had been mistaken, as, if Seriozha was right, she could not have seen the lame man in Perm, that was only an illusion. But still it seemed so to her, and being taciturn when she had ideas like that, turning over everything of Perm she could recall, she followed her brother, making this or that movement, holding on to this or that, stepping over this or that, and then looked round her and found she was in the half-light of counters and light cardboard boxes and shelves and over-anxious good-afternoons and attention—and . . . Seriozha was speaking.

The book they wanted the bookseller (who sold all sorts of tobacco) had not got, but he reassured them and averred that the Turgenev was definitely coming, in fact had been sent from Moscow, was on the way, and that it was only a minute or so ago that he had been talking about it to Mr Tzvetkov himself, that is to say, to their schoolmaster. His slippery tongue and

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the illusion he was under tickled the two children mightily and they said *good afternoon* and went out empty-handed.

Once outside, Zhenia turned to her brother.

"Seriozha, I always forget to ask you; do you know the street we can see from our wood-pile?"

"No. Never been there."

"That's a lie. I've seen you myself."

"From the wood-pile? You . . ."

"Well, no, not from the wood-pile, but in that street, on the other side of Cherep-Savvich's garden."

"Oh, that's what you're thinking of. You're right. You can see it as you go by. The other side of the garden in the back-ground. Some sheds and a wood-pile. I say, so that's *our* courtyard? That yard? Ours? Why, I'd never realized that! And how often I've been by there and thought how fine it would be to get up there once, on that wood, and then on the roof—I've seen a ladder up there. So that's our own yard?"

"Seriozha, will you show me the way there?"

"What, again? But it's our yard. What's there to show? You know——"

"Seriozha, you never understand me. I'm talking about the street, and you're talking about the yard. Show me the way to that street. Show me how to get there. You will, Seriozha, won't you?"

"But still I don't understand. Why, we've just been down it—and we'll be there again in a minute."

"You don't say so!"

"But of course. And the coppersmith? At the corner."

"So then that dusty street . . ."

"Why, of course, the one you keep asking me about! The Cherep-Savviches are at the end, on the right. Oh, don't hang behind, we mustn't be late for dinner. There's crayfish today."

They began to talk of something else. The Akhmedianovs had promised to teach him to tin samovars. And as for her question about what tin was, tin was a kind of mountain rock, otherwise ore, like lead, only dull. It was used for lining cans and mending pots, and the Akhmedianovs knew how to do all that.

Then they had to run across the street or a train of wagons would have kept them back. That made them both forget—she her request about that little-used alley, and Seriozha about his promise to show it her. They passed the door of the shop, where Zhenia drew in a sharp breath of that warm greasy smoke which you get when you clean brass door-handles and candlesticks, and then remembered where she had once seen that stranger, him and the three strange girls, and what they were doing. The next instant she realized that the Mr Tzvetkov the bookseller had spoken about was that very same man with the limp.

VI

Negarot left by an evening train. Her father went to see him off. He did not get back from the station till late at night, and his appearance caused a tremendous disturbance in the porter's lodge, which did not subside for a long time. People went out with lanterns and they were shouting for somebody. It was pouring with rain and somebody's geese were loose and making a din.

Day rose gloomy and shaky. The wet grey street danced as if rubber, and there was a nasty drizzle fluttering down and spattering mud about. Wagon wheels sloshed and squelched as they passed. People in goloshes.

Zhenia was on her way home. There were still echoes of the night's disturbance about in the yard; she was not able to have the carriage. She had said she was going to the shop for some hemp seed, and ran round to see her friend; but when half-way there she felt sure she would never find her way alone from the shop to the Defendovs' house, so she turned back. Then she remembered that it was too early anyway—Liza would be at school. She was now thoroughly soaked and was shivering with cold. The sky was clearing under the stiff wind, but it was still raining. There was a cold white hard light which ripped down the street and clung to the wet paving-stones in sheets. The gloomy clouds were speeding away out of

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the town; at the end of the square beyond the three-armed street lamp they grew panicky and piled one on top of the other.

To move like that he must have been either a very slovenly person or unprincipled. The furniture of a rather poor study was not packed on the dray, but simply stood on it just as it had stood in the room, and the castors of the arm-chairs peeping out from under the white dust-covers rolled to and fro every time the wagon tipped one way or the other. The covers were snowy white in spite of being soaked through. They were so striking that you only needed to glance at them, for the cobbles, gnawed bare by the rains, for the shivering cold puddles against the fence, for the birds flying from the stables, for the trees flying after them, for the patches of lead, and even that *figus* in the tub which swayed and bowed clumsily to all things flying by, to turn the same colour.

That was a crazy load. It made everybody look at it. There was a peasant striding beside it: the platform tipped right over as it moved slowly forward, the wheels plunging into potholes. And over all this croaking tattered thung hung a wet leaden-coloured word—*town*, which in her mind gave rise to a host of ideas as transient as that chill October light which winged past her and fluttered to the wet street.

"He'll catch cold; he'll only ruin his things," she said to herself, of the unknown owner. And she imagined the man—*an abstract sort of man, like a roller, step by step staggering about putting his bits of property in their respective places*. She had a vivid picture of how he got hold of things and how he moved, and particularly how he took a duster and poked about round the tub and wiped the wetted leaves of his *figus*. After which followed sneezes, a cold, a temperature. That without fail Zhenia could see that most vividly too. Most vividly. The wagon rumbled away up towards Isseti. Zhenia had to turn left

.

It must have been somebody's heavy footsteps outside. The tea in the glass on the little table by her bed rose and sank

again. The piece of lemon in the tea rose and sank again. The rays of sunlight on the wallpaper swayed to and fro, like pillars, like the glass tubes with coloured syrup in the shops behind the curtains with Turks smoking. Behind the curtains with Turkains, the Turtains with Curcains, the Curcains with . . . curtains . . . smoking. . . .

It must have been somebody's heavy footsteps. The little patient fell asleep again.

Zhenia had gone down the day after Negarat left, the very day when coming home from her walk she learned that Axinia had had a baby in the night: the day she had seen the wagon of the man who was moving, and concluded that rheumatism had its eyes on him. Her fever lasted a fortnight; painful red pepper all over her, burning her, making her sweat, gumming up her eyes and lips. The steaminess was troublesome, and her sense of taste was mixed up with a horrid feeling of fatness. As if a summer wasp had filled her with a flame and it was blowing her up. As if, like a little grey hair, the wasp's fine sting was still in her and she wanted to pull it out, over and over again, all ways out. Out of her purple temples, out of her shoulder, gasping in the fire under her nightdress, everywhere. Now she was getting better again. She felt weak all over.

For example, this sense of weakness, it risked everything and showed itself in a strange geometry *all of its own*, which made her a little dizzy and sick at times.

For example, beginning from an episode on the counterpane, the sense of weakness set to piling on it layer on layer of ever-greater spaces, that soon became unbelievably big in that striving of the twilight to assume the shape of a public square which was the very basis of that vagary of space. Or else, starting out from a pattern of the wallpaper, it would drive broadnesses row after row up towards her, gliding as if greased, one replacing the other, and also, like all those sensations, wearing you down by their steady and regular growth in sheer size. Or else it tortured her ill body with depths which went endlessly lower and lower, revealing their bottomlessness from the very outset, from the very first thing in the parquet, then lowered her bed towards the bottom, gently, gently, and her

with the bed. Then her head would be in the position of a lump of sugar cast on to the high tide of terrible, empty, unseasoned chaos, and be dissolved in it, melting away in transparent whorls.

This was caused by heightened sensitivity of the oral labyrinths.

It was somebody's heavy footsteps. The lemon sank and then rose again. Also the sun on the wallpaper rose and sank constantly. At last she woke up. Her mother came in and congratulated her on being better at last, and seemed to her to be able to read her thoughts. As she was coming to she had heard something about it. That was—the congratulations of her own arms and legs and elbows and knees, congratulations from them as she stretched her body. It was their congratulations indeed that wakened her. And now Mummy too. What a strange coincidence!

The whole household was now in and out, sitting on her bed a few moments and then off again. She put question after question, and they answered. There were things which had changed during her illness; others were unchanged. Those unchanged she did not bother about, but she could not let the others alone. Apparently Mummy herself was unchanged, and Daddy was quite obviously exactly the same. But these had changed: she herself, Seriozha, the distribution of light in the room, the quietness of everybody else, and still other things, ever so many things. Had the winter snow come yet? No. There had been snow, then a thaw, then a bit of frost, nobody knew what they were coming to, everything was bare, no snow at all. She scarcely noticed whom she questioned, or about what. The answers got all tangled. Those who were well came and went. Liza came. They would not let her in at first. Then they remembered that you cannot catch measles twice, and let her in. Dikikh came. She scarcely noticed who gave her what answer. When they all went to dinner, and she was alone with Ouliasha, she remembered how they had all laughed in the kitchen at a silly question of hers. She then took care not to do the same again. She had put an intelligent, business-like question—like a grown-up. She had asked if Axinia was in the

family way again. That made the girl drop a spoon as she was clearing away, and turn to one side. "Oh, well I never. . . . Now do let her get her breath. . . . Zhenia, my pet, she can't have them all at one go." And she ran out and shut the door firmly. And then Zhenia had heard the whole kitchen roar with laughter, as if the swirl of shrill chatter, the charwoman and Galim being the butts, and the din rising steadily till it seemed they had passed from teasing to fighting, when someone came and closed the door which they had forgotten.

So that question she must not ask That would be sillier still.

VII

What, surely not thawing again? So today again they would go out in the carriage, and still could not put it on the runners? Zhenia would spend hours standing at the little window, till her nose was cold and her hands frozen. Dikikh had just gone. He was displeased with her now. But she would like to see anyone learn her lessons there in the house, with the cocks crowing about the yards all round, and the sky a-buzz, and when that died down, then the cocks again. Clouds dirty and tattered, like a moth-eaten sleigh-rug. The day thrust its snout against the window-pane like a calf in its steamy stall. Why was it not spring? But after dinner the air gripped everything in a hoop of grey cold, the sky wrinkled and shrank, and you could hear the clouds' wheezy breathing. As if impatient for the winter dusk, impatient for the north, the fitting hours rent the last leaves from the trees, stripped the lawns bare, pierced through crevices and tore at people's bodies. The nozzles of the northern Mother Earth began to show dark beyond the house-tops: they were pointing directly at their yard, loaded with a huge November. But it was still only October.

But it was still only October; there had not been a winter like this in living memory. People were saying the autumn-sown wheat had perished and there was famine to be feared. As if someone had taken a sceptre and waved it and passed it over chimneys and roofs and the boxes for the starlings, next

Spring, saying—smoke here, snow here, hoarfrost here. But there was neither snow nor frost. The desert, wilted twilight, pined for them. They strained their eyes, and the earth ached from early lighting in the streets and fires in the houses, just as one's head aches from long expectation and the misery of strained eyes. Everything was tense, expectant; winter wood was stocked in the kitchens, the clouds had been bursting with snow for a fortnight, the air was heavy with darkness. When would that magician who managed it all, whom one's eye could see, when would he swirl his magic circles and pronounce his curse and summon winter, the spirit of which was surely waiting at the door?

Yet how slack they had been, neglecting it so. It's true they never paid much attention to the calendar in the classroom. She tore the pages off her own. But all the same! August the twenty-ninth! Cunning, as Seriozha would have said. A Red-letter Day. *The Beheading of John the Baptist*. It came off its nail easily. Having nothing better to do she set about tearing the old leaves off. A monotonous job, so that after a while she simply forgot what her fingers were doing, though from time to time she would mutter: "Thirtieth—so now for the thirty-first."

"It's three days since she set foot out of doors!" Those words, heard in the corridor, wrenched her back from her daydream, and she saw how far she had got. Past *The Presentation of the Virgin* even. Her mother touched her hand.

"Zhenia, what is the meaning of this . . ."

The rest of her mother's words might not have been spoken. As if wakening from a dream Zhenia asked her mother to say *The Beheading of John the Baptist*. Her mother said it, thoroughly puzzled. She did not pronounce it at all like Axinia.

The very next minute Zhenia was astounded at her own self. What on earth was that? Whoever suggested that to her? Wherever had that come from? Had she, Zhenia, really asked her mother that? Or was it possible she had really thought her mother . . . ? How fantastic, how unreal! Whose invention now was that . . . ?

All this time her mother stood looking at her, unable to

believe her ears, staring at her wide-open eyes. This astonishing sally really puzzled her. The question looked like mockery; but her little daughter's eyes were swimming with tears.

.

Those hazy presentiments of hers came true. When out for a drive she heard the air grow softer, saw the clouds melt inwards, heard the click of hoofs muffle. The street lamps were still not lit when little grey tufts of dry down began to wander through the air. But they had not even reached the bridge when those few scattered flakes gave place to a solid wall of snow swooping down on them. Davletsha jumped down and raised the leather hood. Then Zhenia and Seriozha found it dark and tight inside. Zhenia wanted to be furious like the furious storm outside. They noticed that Davletsha was driving them home simply because they again heard the bridge under Vykormish's hoofs. The streets were unrecognizable; there were no streets left. Night had descended in an instant: the town lost its head and was one solid stir of countless thousands of pale lips. Seriozha leant out and, supporting himself with his knee, told Davletsha to drive to the workshop row. Zhenia caught her breath in ecstasy, beheld all the delights and charms of winter in the way Seriozha's words rang out in the air. Davletsha shouted back that they would have to go straight home, not to tire the horse too much, as the master and mistress were going to the theatre, and he would have to put the carriage on runners, too. Zhenia then remembered that Mummy and Daddy would be out, and she would be alone. She made up her mind at once to make herself ever so comfy by the lamp and have a good long read at the volume of *The Fables of Pussy-cat* which were 'only for grown-ups'. She would have to get it out of Mummy's bedroom. And some chocolate. And then read, munching at chocolate, and listen to the sound of the streets being swept outside.

Oh, but it was coming down properly now, and no mistaking it. The skies shuddered and from them out came foundering whole white empires and continents without end. And they

were both mysterious and frightful. It was clear that those falling worlds (who knew whence) had never heard either of life or of this world, or the earth, and being midnight things and blind they smothered it, because they neither saw it nor knew about it.

They were ravishingly frightful, those empires; absolutely satanically rapturous. Zhenia caught her breath as she gazed on them. And the air staggered to and fro, grasping at that falling universe, and far, far away, in pain, oh, in what pain, the countryside howled as if seared by whips. Everything was confusion. Night rushed at them, infuriated by that single grey hair, low fallen, which cut into it and blinded it. Everything was scattered far and wide, shrieking, no matter where. And hailing cry and wailing answer alike were lost, never met, died, over many roofs, swept away by the blizzard. Blinding.

They stamped and stamped in the hall, and shook the snow off their fluffy short white fur coats. And what pools of water running from the goloshes on to the check linoleum! The table was covered with egg-shells, the pepper-pot had been taken out of the cruet and not put back, there was a lot of pepper spilt on the table-cloth, and on the yolk which had run out and in the tin with the unfinished 'seredines'—Wednesday fish!* Father and mother had already had their supper, but were still sitting in the dining-room, and trying to hurry the children, who dawdled. They did not scold them, because they had supped long before their time, as they were going to the theatre. Mummy could not make up her mind now whether to go or not, and was ever so sad. When she saw her mother, Zhenia too remembered that really she ought not to be the least happy herself—oh, at last she got that rotten fastener undone—rather, she ought to be sad, and when she came into the dining-room she asked what had been done with the walnut cake. Then her father looked at her mother and said nobody was forcing them, and so they might as well stay at home.

"No, why," mummy said, "after all I ought to have some amusement, the doctor gave permission."

* In Russian Wednesday is *sereda*, or "middle" (sc. of the week).

"Well, make up your mind."

"But where is that cake?" Zhenia asked again. For answer she got the information that the cake would not run away, that there were other things to eat before she got to the cake, that nobody began supper with cake, the cake was in the cupboard—just as if she had never been in the house before, had just arrived, and did not know where things were kept. Her father said all this, and then turned to her mother again and said.

"Make up your mind."

"It's made up, we'll go."

And, with a sad smile at Zhenia, her mother went to dress. While Seriozha, tapping his egg with the egg-spoon and taking care not to miss, announced to his father in business-like fashion, as if very busy, that the weather had changed—there was a blizzard, he ought to bear that in mind—and burst out laughing. Now that his nose had thawed out it was not behaving as it should, and he screwed up his face, then got his handkerchief out of the pocket of his tight uniform breeches and blew it just as his father had taught him, 'so as not to damage the ear-drums', then got busy with the egg-spoon again, and, looking his father straight in the face, his own cheeks ruddy from the drive and freshly washed, said:

"Just as we were going out we saw Negarat's friend. You know."

"Evans?" his father asked, absent-mindedly.

"We don't know that man," Zhenia cried hotly.

"Vikal" came from the bedroom.

Their father got up and answered the call. In the doorway Zhenia came on Ouliasha, bringing her a lighted lamp. Soon the door next to hers banged to. That was Seriozha, gone to his room. He was magnificent today, his sister loved the Akhmedianovs' friend to be a real boy, and she loved to be able to speak of his wearing the high-school uniform.

Doors opening and shutting. Stamping about in snow-boots. At last *they* had gone, the master and mistress. The letter informed Ouliasha that she 'up to now had not been so nice about asking and you might as well say what you want now

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just the same', and when the 'dear sister', loaded with presents and assurances had gone through the whole family saying who was to have what, Ouliasha, who now turned out to be a dignified 'Ouliava', said "Thank you" to her young mistress, turned the lamp down and left the room, taking with her the letter, the ink-well and a greasy piece of octavo paper that was left.

Then Zhenia applied herself again to her homework. She did not put the figures in brackets. She went on dividing away, copying out figure after figure. There seemed to be no end to it. Endless recurring decimals. 'What if measles kept recurring,' she thought suddenly: 'Dikikh today said something about infinity.' She no longer knew what she was doing. She felt that that afternoon something of the same sort had happened to her, and she had also wanted to sleep or cry, but when it was and what was really the matter she could not make out—because she had not the strength to think of anything. The noise outside had subsided. The blizzard was gradually dying down. Decimal fractions were quite new to her. There was no room on the right, and she decided to start over again, write smaller, and check every figure. Outside it was deathly silent now. She was afraid of forgetting what she had borrowed and not carrying the right figure over.

'The window won't run away,' she said to herself, continuing to pour three's and seven's into bottomless space, 'and I shall hear them in good time; it's quiet everywhere; they won't come up at once; they'll have their furs on, and Mother pregnant; but the point is, 3737 goes on repeating, I can either go on copying it out or . . .' And suddenly recalled that that was just what Dikikh had been saying only an hour or so ago—that she *need not divide out, but simply discard them*. She rose and went to the window.

It was now clear outside. Only rare flakes swam out of the darkness into the light of the street lamp, floated up, sailed round it and vanished again. In their place new ones. The street glistened with the dignified snow-white carpet spread over it. It was white, bright and sweet like candied cakes in fairy stories. Zhenia stood some time at the window gazing at those

circles and figures which the Andersenian silvery snowflakes performed. And then she went to Mummy's room for the *Cat* book. She went without a light. She could see without one. The stable roof filled the room with a ceaseless sparkle. The beds froze under the sigh of that huge roof and glittered. Here in disorder lay discarded smoky silk. Diminutive little bodices gave out an oppressive and stuffy odour of armpits and calico. There was the scent of violets and the cupboard was bluish dark, like the night outside, and like that dry warm darkness in which those freezing-cold glitterings moved. One of the knobs of the bed gleamed, a lonely bead. The other was extinguished by a slip thrown over it. Zhenia half closed her eyes, and the bead separated from the floor and moved towards the wardrobe. Then she remembered what she had come in for. Book in hand she went to one of the bedroom windows. It was a starry night. Winter had arrived in Ekaterinburg. She looked out into the yard and her thoughts turned to Pushkin. She made up her mind to ask her tutor to give her an essay to do on Onegin.

Seriozha wanted to talk. He said:

"You been putting scent on yourself? Give me some."

He had been very sweet all day. He was very red in the face. And she could not help thinking that perhaps there never would be such an evening again. She wanted to be alone.

She went back to her own room and set about reading the cat stories. She read one and began another, holding her breath. She was so absorbed in it she did not hear her brother going to bed in the next room. An extraordinary sort of game now began of its own accord to play over her face. She was not aware of it. At one moment her features swam out of shape and turned fish-face; her lower lip dangled and her lifeless pupils, fixed by fear to the page, refused to rise, afraid of finding *it* behind the tall-boy. Then she suddenly began nodding to the printed letters, as if in sympathy with them, as if approving them, just as people approve something somebody has done and are pleased at the turn events have taken. She dawdled over reading the descriptions of lakes and rushed headlong ahead into the dense mass of nocturnal scenes

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with a fragment of guttering Bengal fire on which their illumination depended. In one place a character was lost and shouted at intervals and then listened carefully for a reply, but heard only his own echo. So intent was she then that her throat began to tickle and caused a fit of coughing. The un-Russian name of Myrrha brought her back to reality. She put the book on one side and lost herself in thought. 'So that's what winter is like in Asia. I wonder what those Chinese are doing now, on so dark a night?' Her eyes fell on the clock. 'How creepy it must be to be with Chinese in this darkness.' Zhenia looked at the clock again, and was horrified. Any moment her parents might come home. It was well on the way to twelve o'clock. She unlaced her boots and then remembered she had to put the book back in its place.

.

Zhenia started from her sleep. She sat up in bed, eyes starting out of her head. This was no burglar. There were a number of people and they were running about and talking loudly, as if it were daytime. Suddenly somebody shrieked out as if their throat had been cut, and something was dragged along, chairs were knocked over. It was a woman shrieking. Gradually Zhenia recognized them all; all but the woman. An extraordinary chasing-about began, doors banging. When the farthest door banged it seemed somebody was trying to stop the woman shrieking by putting a hand on her mouth. But she got free and scaled the whole flat with a burning knife-like cry. Zhenia's hair stood on end, because the woman was her mother; and *Zhenia guessed*. There was Ouliasha lamenting and then after catching her father's voice once Zhenia did not get it again. Then Seriozha was being pushed in somewhere, and bellowing "You daren't lock me in".

"There are no strangers"—and just as she was, barefoot in her little nightie, Zhenia rushed out into the passage. Her father nearly fell over her. He had not taken his overcoat off. As he ran past he shouted something to Ouliasha.

"Papal!"

She saw him come running back with the marble basin from the bathroom.

"Papal!"

"Where's Lipa?" she heard him shout as he ran, beside himself.

Splashing water on to the floor, he disappeared inside, and when a second later he reappeared, coatless and in shirt-sleeves, Zhenia found herself wrapped in Ouliasha's arms, but did not catch what was being said in that desperate, deep, exhausted whisper.

"What's the matter with Mummy?"

By way of answer Ouliasha kept on saying:

"You mustn't Zhenia, pet, you mustn't, darling, go to sleep, wrap yourself up in bed, lie on your little side. Ah, O, Lord God Almighty!"

You mustn't, you mustn't, she kept on saying, wrapping her away from it, as if she were a baby, and taking her away; *you mustn't, you mustn't*, but what she *mustn't* was never said, only Ouliasha's face was wet and her hair all tangled. A key turned on her, three doors away.

Zhenia lit a match to see if it would soon be daylight. It was only a little after twelve. That surprised her very much. Was it possible she had not been asleep even one hour? Meanwhile the noise in the other part of the flat did not die down. Howls broke out, exploding, riddling the house. Then for a short instant there succeeded an immense silence, eternity. This silence swallowed up hasty steps and quick, cautious speech. Then there was a ring of the door-bell. Then another. Then so much talk and disputing and ordering about that it seemed the flat would be burned away by all those voices, like tables under a thousand extinguished candelabra.

Zhenia fell asleep. Crying. Dreamed there were visitors. Kept counting them and getting them wrong. Every time she got one too many. And every time she made the same mistake she felt the same horror that she had felt when she realized it was none other than her mother.

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How could anybody help being glad to see such a bright clear morning. Seriozha at once thought of out-door games, snowballing, fights with the yard kids. They had their morning tea in the class-room. They were told the floor polishers were in the dining-room. Their father came in. It was obvious at once that he did not know anything about the floor polishers. He did not know a single thing about them. He told them the real true cause of this move. Their mother had been taken ill. She needed quiet. Untrammelled and buoyant in their cawing, rooks flew by over the white film of street. A sleigh swooped past, pushing a miserable little horse in front of it. The horse was not used to the new thing behind it and missed its step.

"You're going to stay with the Defendovs, I've made all the arrangements. And you . . ."

"Why?" Zhenia interrupted him.

But Seriozha had guessed why and before his father could speak, said:

"Because of the infection of course."

But the street outside would not let him go on and he ran to the window as if someone had beckoned him. A Tatar, out in new rig, was a magnificent sight, like a cock pheasant. Lamb-skin high cap on his head. And his sheepskin overcoat, wool inside, blazed brighter than morocco leather. He walked with a roll, no doubt because that raspberry-coloured fish-boning on his white winter boots was completely oblivious of the construction of human joints; those arabesques sprawled all over the place, little caring whether they were on boots or tea-cups or roof guttering. But the most noticeable thing was—just at that moment the groans feebly coming from the bedroom grew louder, and Father went out into the passage, and told them they were not to follow him—the most noticeable thing was the track he made with them, a narrow clear-cut little ribbon across the smooth expanse. So clean and neat, squashed to ice, they made the snow look even whiter and more satin-like.

"Here's a note, which you'll give to Mr Defendov. To nobody else, understand? Well, come along, get your clothes on. Ouliasha'll be here with them in a moment. You'll go out by the back door. And the Akhmedianovs are expecting you."

"Ho, really expecting me, are they!" Seriozha was saucy.
 "Yes. Dress in the kitchen"

Father seemed very distracted, as he led them slowly into the kitchen, where there was a heap of coats and caps and mittens on a stool ready for them. A gust of winter air swirled up the shaft of the stairs. The sleighs swished past outside with a scroop and a sigh. The children were all in a hurry and they could not find their sleeve-holes. Their things smelt of chests and sleepy furs.

"What are you doing!"

"Don't stand it on the edge, it'll fall off. Well, how now?"

"Still groaning"

The kitchen-maid gathered her apron in her hands and stooped and grabbed some wood: as she opened the stove door to stuff it in, the fierce flame gasped. "Not my doing" she muttered indignantly, as she went back to her own world. In a battered black old pail was a mess of broken glass and yellow prescriptions. The towels were soaked with shaggy, lumpy blood. They blazed. One felt one wanted to stamp them out, like smouldering tinder. The stove was covered with saucepans of water heating. All about the kitchen were white cups and mortars, of shapes they had never seen, like at the chemist's. In the hall little Galim was cracking ice. Seriozha wanted to know if there was still much of last year's ice left.

"There'll soon be fresh ice," he said. "Give me some. What are you wasting it for?"

"Whatcher mean, wastin' it? I gotta break it up for t'bottles."

"Now then there, are you ready?"

No. Zhenia had run back into the house again. Seriozha went out on to the landing and while he waited for her, he drummed on the iron railing with a piece of firewood.

VIII

The Defendov household were just about to begin supper. Grandmother Defendov crossed herself and flopped heavily

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into her arm-chair. The lamp burned badly and was smoking; first they turned it too high, then too low, time and again. Defendov's bony hand was always reaching out to the screw, and when he slowly took his hand away from the lamp and sat back again his hand shook, not like an old man's, but with a tiny quivering, as if he was lifting a wineglass filled brimful. It was the tips of his fingers quivered, from the nail down.

He spoke in an even voice with precise enunciation, just as if his talking did not consist of sounds, but was built up out of separate letters, and he pronounced everything, even the letters which didn't sound.

The bulbous globe of the lamp glowed fierce between the whiskers provided by the geranium and the heliotrope. Cockroaches huddled close to the warmth and the hands of the clock reached cautiously over towards it. And time crept by in the way it does in winter. This was where it ripened to a head. Outside it was set rigid, foul-smelling. Under the window it was all fuss, poking about to one side and the other, doubling and trebling in little tongues of light.

Mrs Defendov put the roast on the table. Clouds of steam rose; seasoned with onion. Defendov made a little speech full of "I heartily recommend," and Liza's tongue never stopped once, but Zhenia heard neither of them. She had wanted to cry all day, because of yesterday, and now the longing grew desperate. Cry in that blouse too, made exactly as Mummy ordered.

Defendov guessed what was the matter, and did his best to take her mind off it, which meant that one moment he would try talking to her as if she were a babe in arms, and the next, fly off to the other extreme. His jocular questions frightened her and made her feel awkward. He fumbled and fingered the soul of this little friend of his daughter, just as if he was asking her heart how old it was. As soon as he was *unquestionably* certain of any little trait, he harped on it to try and make her forget her own home, but merely succeeded in reminding her that she was among strangers.

At last she could stand it no longer. She suddenly stood up and, shy as any child might well be, muttered:

"Thank you. I've really had enough. Can I go and look at pictures?"

And then, blushing crimson when she saw the general astonishment on all faces, nodded towards the middle room and said:

"Walter Scott. May I?"

"Of course, dearie, of course, run along," said Grandmother Defendov's toothless lips, while with fierce brows she fixed Liza in her place. Then she turned to her son.

"Poor little kid," she said, when the claret-coloured curtains had closed behind Zhenia.

A sombre complete set of *The North* bent one shelf down and on the bottom shelf was the dull gold of the complete works of Karamzin. A pink lantern hanging from the ceiling failed to light up a couple of threadbare little arm-chairs, and a small rug lost in the utter darkness was a surprise to her feet.

Zhenia had thought she was going to go into that room, sit down and burst into sobs. But though tears come to her eyes they could not break through her grief. How was she ever to roll away the barrier which last night's misery had put there? Tears would not come and she was powerless to remove the obstruction. To assist her tears she turned her thoughts to her mother.

For the first time in her life, now she was about to spend the night in a strange house she measured the depth of her attachment to that dear person, most precious thing in all the world

Suddenly, through the curtains, she heard Liza's loud laughter.

"Oh, you little imp, you . . ."

And Grandmother Defendov coughed and rocked to and fro. Zhenia was astounded to think she had once thought she loved that girl whose laughter was ringing out in the next room but who was so far from her, meant nothing to her. And something in her turned right over and let the tears come at the same instant as her mother came back to her, suffering, lost away back there in the long chain of yesterday's events, which was like a crowd of people seeing her off, dizzily seen

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in the far distance as the train of time swept Zhenia away from her.

That keen look that her mother had fixed on her the day before in the class-room was absolutely, absolutely unbearable. It had cut deep into her mind and would not leave it, and everything Zhenia was now going through became part of it. As if it were a thing she ought to have taken and kept great care of, but had been scorned and forgotten.

She might have lost her head altogether through that feeling, its intoxicating demented bitterness and inevitability played such havoc with her, and she stood by the window and wept copiously and silently, letting the tears flow unwiped, her hands not being free to touch them, though those hands were doing nothing else, merely stretched out, tense and strong and stubborn and straight.

Then a sudden thought dazzled her. She all at once felt how *terribly* like her mother she was. This feeling merged into a sensation of living infallibility capable of transforming concept into reality by the mere force of that staggeringly sweet state of resemblance. The sensation pierced her through and through till she could have cried from the pain of it. *It was the sensation of a woman inwardly or from within perceiving her own external nature and charm.* Zhenia could not cope with it; this was the very first time she had experienced it.

She went back to the Defendovs drunk from tears, but illumined, and she walked now with another walk, not her own, but with broad, dreamily straddling steps. When she saw her come in Mr Defendov felt at once that the idea he had formed of this little girl while she was out of the room did not fit, and had the samovar not engaged his attention he would have formed a new one.

Mrs Defendov went out to the kitchen for a tray, leaving the samovar on the floor, all eyes fixed on the smoking copper as if it was a live creature, whose miserable waywardness was bound to cease the instant it was lifted back on to the table. Zhenia went back to her place. She made up her mind now to talk to everybody. She had a vague feeling that after this it was for her to choose the topic of conversation, or they would

keep her for ever in the isolated state she had been in before, and not see that her mother was there with her, in her. Such shortsightedness would hurt her, and, what was more, would hurt her Mummy. And as if her mother were really there to encourage her, she turned to Mrs Defendov, who was with some difficulty edging the samovar on to the tray.

"Vassa Vassilievna . . ." she said like, any other grown-up.

"And can you have babies?"

Liza did not answer Zhenia at once.

"Shh! Don't shout, silly!" Then: "Why, of course I can, like all other girls."

This was said in a jerky jumpy whisper. Zhenia could not see her friend's face. Liza was feeling about on the table, but could not find the matches.

She knew a lot more about all that than Zhenia did. In fact, she knew *everything*—just as do all children who learn of such things from chance words dropped here and there. And then all those natures which are favourites of their maker rise in revolt and indignation and become wild. Through this trial they cannot pass without pathology. It would be completely unnatural otherwise. Childish madness at this age is merely the seal of profound normality.

One day Liza had heard a string of foolish stuff and dirty nonsense about those matters whispered furtively. Liza did not turn a hair, but kept it all close in her mind and carried it home. Not a detail of it did she lose on the way home, but preserved the whole mass of rubbish. She found out everything. There was no conflagration in her organism, no tocsin was sounded by her heart, nor was there any attack by soul on brain for daring to learn anything on the sly like that, apart from her, not from her own lips, her soul, but without asking.

"I know too."

('No you don't know anything at all,' said Liza to herself.)

"I know," Zhenia repeated, "I'm not asking about that."

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What I want to know is, do you ever feel as if, if you took just one more step, you'd have a baby at once?"

"Do come inside," Liza cried in a hoarse voice, stifling her laughter. "Fine place you pick to shout. Why, they could hear you, standing in the doorway."

This conversation took place in Liza's room. Liza spoke so quietly that Zhenia could hear the water dripping from the tap. She had found the matches now, but she did not want to light the lamp for a moment, as she could not at once screw up her grinning cheeks into a serious expression. She did not want to hurt her friend's feelings. And she had mercy on Zhenia's ignorance because she was unable to imagine talking about those things in any other way but using expressions which she could not use at home, let alone in front of a friend who did not go to school.

Then she lit the lamp. Luckily the bucket had filled and ran over, so Liza hastily turned to wiping up the floor and hid a new fit of giggles in her pinafore and the swishing of her mop till at last there was an excuse and she could laugh out loud. Her comb had fallen into the bucket.

All the while she was there Zhenia had only one thought—of her own people—and constantly longed for the hour when they would send for her. And to that end, every afternoon, when Liza was at school and she was alone in the house with Grandmother Defendov, Zhenia too dressed and went out alone to stretch her legs.

The life of that hamlet on the outskirts of the town was little like the life of any of the places where the Lüvers had ever lived. Most of the day it was deserted and dull. There was nothing for one's eye to dwell on. There was nothing to look at but material for birch rods or brooms. There was coal lying about. People simply tipped their dirty slops out into the street, where they immediately turned white, freezing. At certain hours of the day the street did fill with people, common people. The factory workers swarmed over the snow like beetles. The

doors of the tea-houses ran on rollers and soapy steam poured out of them like out of wash-houses. Strange, but it seemed somehow warmer in the street, as if they were getting round to spring again, when those sodden peasant shirts hurried stooping by, the felt slippers at the end of their thin trousers twinkling. The pigeons showed no fear of those crowds, but flew down the road for the food which was there. Was there not enough oats and barley and horse droppings littering the snow? The meat-pie woman's stall gleamed with grease and warmth, and that grease and that warmth disappeared down cheap-brandly bespattered throats. The grease brought fire to them, and then, on the way back, it came out of those fast-breathing chests. Was it that perhaps that warmed the street?

Just as suddenly it would be empty again, as dusk came down. Peasant sleighs went home empty, and low sleighs raced by with bearded men lost in fur coats and all laughter, bodies rolling back and embracing each other like bears. They left behind them little wisps of sad hay and the sweet endless melting of their sleigh bells. Shopkeepers vanished round the corner beyond the birches, which from where Zhenia was, looked like a ragged stockade.

And this was where those crows came who flew over their house with that untrammelled cawing. Only here they did not caw. Here they called a halt to cawing, tucked in their wings, and squatted on fences and then, all of a sudden, as if at some sign, swept off in a cloud to master the trees and jostling one another settle about those vacated branches. Ah, how clearly then she could feel what a late hour it was in the whole wide world! Such lateness as no clock face could ever tell you!

Thus a week passed, and towards the end of the second week, at daybreak on the Thursday, she saw him again. Liza's bed was empty. Waking, Zhenia heard the wicket-gate clatter to behind her. She got up and went to the window without lighting the lamp. It was still quite dark. But she could sense that in the sky and the branches of the trees and

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the movements of the dogs there was the same heaviness that there had been the previous day. This was the third day of that overcast weather, and there was no more the strength to drag it off the dilapidated street than to drag a heavy iron saucepan off a rough shelf.

In a window opposite a lamp was lit. Two bright shafts of light pointed under the horse's belly and illuminated shaggy fetlocks. Shadows moved about the snow, and the arms of a ghostly figure wrapping its fur coat round it moved, and the light in the curtained window moved. But the little nag stood motionless, asleep.

Then she saw who it was. She knew him at once by his outline. The limping man took up a lantern and walked away with it. At his heels went two shafts of light, tipping to one side or other, lengthening and shortening, and behind them the sleigh, which swiftly flashed into sight and swifter still plunged back into darkness as it slowly went round the house to the front porch.

Strange that Tzvetkov should still come across her path here, in this hamlet outside the town. Yet it did not surprise Zhenia. She was not really interested in him. Soon the lantern appeared again and moved steadily past all the curtains, then started back again, and then all at once was on the window-sill behind the same curtain, where it had started.

This was Thursday. And on Friday, at last, they sent for her.

IX

When, ten days after her return home, and more than a three-weeks' break, lessons were resumed, Zhenia learned all the rest from her tutor. After dinner the doctor got ready and left, and she asked him to give her greetings to the house in which he had attended her that spring, and to all the streets, and to the River Kama. He expressed a hope that there would be no more need to send to Perm for him. She went to the gate with this man who had given her such shudders the very first morning when, after coming back from the Defendovs, while

Mummy was asleep and nobody was allowed into her room, in answer to her question, what was wrong with Mummy, he had begun by reminding her that *that* night Daddy and Mummy had gone to the theatre. And that after the play, as the people were coming out, their cob . . .

"Vykormysh?"

"Yes, if that's what you call him . . . well, Vykormysh, then, got restive and reared and knocked down and crushed a man who happened to be passing . . ."

"What? Killed him?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

"And Mummy?"

"Mummy had a bad shock," and he smiled, having scarcely thought in time of that way of adapting his Latin *partus praematurus* to a little girl's ears.

"And then my dead little brother was born?"

"Who told you? . . . Yes."

"But when? Were they there? Or did they find him already dead? Don't tell me. Oh, how terrible. Now I understand. He was already dead, or I should have heard him even if they had not been there. Because I was reading. Late that night. I should have heard. But when exactly did he live? Doctor, are such things possible? I even went into the bedroom. He was dead. There was no doubt about it."

How lucky that what she had seen from the Defendovs' house, at dawn, had been only last night, and that horror at the theatre three weeks ago! What luck she had recognised him. So much was clear to her—that if she had not seen him at all, after what the doctor had now told her she would have been sure to conclude that it was *he* who had been crushed at the theatre. And so, having spent so much time there and become quite one of the family, the doctor left.

That evening her tutor came. It had been washing day, and in the kitchen they were mangling the linen. Hoar-frost dropped off her shoulders, and the garden pressed close to the panes and wrapped itself in the lace curtains and came right up to the table. The jerky rumble of the mangle kept forcing its way into the conversation. Dikikh, like everybody

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else, found her changed. For that matter, she could see a change in him too.

"Why are you so sad?"

"Am I? Everything's possible. A friend of mine has died."

"You have something to grieve about too? What a lot of deaths—and all at once!"

She sighed

But just as he was about to tell her what sort of a friend he had had, something quite unexpected happened. She suddenly had quite a different view of the number of those who had died, and, evidently forgetting what support she possessed in the lantern she had seen that very morning, was terribly upset and said:

"Wait a moment. One day you went to the tobacconist, the day Negarat left, and I saw you with someone else. Was it him?" She was afraid to say 'Was it Tzvetkov?'

Dikikh was taken aback when he heard what she said. He thought back and recalled that indeed they had gone to buy a paper about that time and tried to buy a complete Turgenev for Mrs Luvers, and it was true his dead friend had been with him. She shuddered and tears sprang to her eyes. But the principal thing was yet to come.

When, with breaks filled by the rumbling of the mangle, Dikikh had told her what a fine young fellow his friend had been, and of what a good family, and at last lit a cigarette, Zhenia was horrified to see that now only this brief delay still separated her from a repetition of the doctor's story, and when at last Dikikh tried and had got out a few words, including the word *theatre*, Zhenia suddenly shrieked and rushed out of the room, beside herself.

Dikikh listened carefully. There was not a sound in the house but the rumble of the mangle. He rose to his feet, just like a stork. He stretched out his neck and raised one foot, preparing to rush to her aid. He made off to find her, being sure nobody else was at home, and she had gone mad. And while he was stumbling in the dark, feeling at puzzles of wood, wool and metal, Zhenia was sitting huddled in a corner sobbing. Dikikh went on fumbling round and searching, in thought already

raising her dead body from the floor. He started violently when at his elbow he suddenly heard a low sob-broken voice cry loudly:

"I'm here Do be careful, there's a whatnot right beside you. Wait for me in the class-room. I'll be there in a minute."

The curtains reached the floor and the starry winter night outside also swept the floor, and, waist-deep in the drifts, the low drowsy trees dragged their chains of bare branches through the deep snow towards the bright spot of light in the window. And somewhere on the other side of the wall, taut with sheets, the hard rumble of the mangle persisted. And the tutor puzzled—how was one to explain that sudden outburst of over-sensitivity? Clearly the dead man occupied some very special place in this child's estimation. She had changed so much. He had been explaining recurring decimals to a little girl, whereas this young woman who had just sent him to the class-room. . . . And that was the work of one month? Obviously the deceased had some time or other made a particularly powerful, an ineffaceable impression on her. . . . Impressions of that sort had a name. How extraordinary it all was. He had given her lessons every other day and had never noticed anything. She was a *frightfully nice* kid, and he was terribly sorry for her. But when on earth would she get that cry over and come to him? The whole household must be out. 'I really am sorry for her. What a remarkable night!'

He was mistaken. The kind of impression he was thinking of did not fit the case at all. He was not mistaken. The impression at the bottom of it all was indeed one that never could be erased. But it was far deeper down than he thought. . . . It was beyond the girl's own knowing, because it was vitally important and significant, and its significance consisted in this being the first time that *another person*, a stranger, had intruded in her life, and it was of no account who this was, or what name the person had, or that neither hatred nor love were aroused; *it was the same person that you get in the imperative form of a verb* concerning precise names and concepts, when people said: thou shalt not steal, and all the rest. Such commandments say: 'You, you, particular living individual, do not do to

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hazy generalized person anything that you, particular living person, do not wish to be done to yourself.' Dikikh's most clumsy error of all was in thinking that impressions of that kind have a name. They have not.

As for her tears, they were because Zhenia felt she was herself to blame for it all. Was she not responsible for introducing that person into the life of the family that day by seeing him across the garden, and, once having thus noticed him, for coming upon him, without need to or purpose or point, constantly, directly and indirectly, even, as happened on that last occasion, contrary to all probability?

When she saw which book Dikikh was taking from the shelves she frowned and said

'No. I won't do that today. Put it back. Please excuse me.'

And, without another word, the same hand that took them out pushed Lermontov's poems back into the little lop-sided row of classics.

Il Tratto Di Apelle

. . . Legend has it that the Greek painter Apelles, calling one day on his rival, Zeuxis, and not finding him at home, drew a brush mark on the wall by which Zeuxis knew who had been in his absence. Zeuxis returned tit for tat. Choosing an hour when he was sure he would not find Apelles at home, he too left his mark, now famous in the world of painting.

I

ON one of those September evenings when the leaning tower of Pisa leads a whole army of leaning sunsets and leaning shadows up the slopes to attack the city, when from the whole of Tuscany, wind-fretted to fury, is wafted the odour of bay leaves rubbed between the fingers, on such an evening, why, what nonsense, I remember the very date, it was August the twenty-third—that evening, when he called at the inn and found Heine out, Emilio Relinquimini requested the cringing service porter to provide him with paper and a light. The man did better. He brought ink too, together with pen and stick of sealing-wax and seal. But with scornful gesture Relinquimini waved him aside. Drawing out the pin which held his tie, he heated this to red heat in the candle-flame, then, jabbing it into his finger, snatched one of the packet of correspondence cards printed with the hotel address, and with the pricked finger-tip bent back one corner. Handing this to the utterly unmoved but ever-obsequious hotel porter, he said:

“Give Mr Heine this visiting card. I shall call again tomorrow, at the same hour.”

The leaning tower of Pisa forced a passage through the cordon of medieval fortifications. The number of people watching it from the bridge increased with every minute. Sunsets—partisan sunsets—crept across the squares. The streets were barricaded with overthrown shadows. In the narrower alleys there was still fighting, shadows hacking one another down. Careless of safety, backwards leant the tower of Pisa, till a giant shadow crept over the sun itself. . . . And day snapped off. Nevertheless, while there were still seconds to run before complete sunset with brief, broken phrases the hotel porter contrived to inform *Signor* Heine of his recent visitor and hand the impatient hotel guest the card with the dried-up, already darkening blot on it.

"Well, what an eccentric!"

Heine however was not slow to guess his visitor's real name. It was the author of the famous poem *Blood—Il sangue*.

The coincidence by which the Ferraran Reliquinini should happen to be in Pisa precisely when the still more accidental whim of the wandering poet Heine the Westphalian brought him to this town, did not seem strange to the German poet. To his mind at once came the anonymous person who had recently sent him that carelessly scrawled, challenging letter. The claim put forward by that stranger really went too far. After some hazy, oblique phrases about the aristocratic, pure-blooded roots of poetry, the unknown correspondent had requested Heine to furnish him with a proof of identity in the style of Apelles. Love, the stranger wrote, that sanguinary wall of mists which can only temporarily befog our otherwise unclouded blood—"well, make some pronouncement about that passion such that your jotting does not exceed the laconic stroke of Apelles' brush in brevity! Do not forget, the only thing your Zeuxis is inquisitive about is to what degree you really do belong to the aristocracy of blood and spirit (inseparable concepts).

"P.S. I have taken advantage of your stay in Pisa, of which I was informed in good time by my publisher, Conti, once and for all time to bring the doubts which torment me to an end.

In three days' time I will call on you again to view your Apelles' mark."

The hotel servant who appeared at Heine's summons was met point-blank with the following instructions from the guest:

"I am catching the ten o'clock train to Ferrara. Tomorrow evening the gentleman with whom you are already familiar—the visitor who left this card—will ask for me. You will hand him this letter. Please let me have my bill at once. And call a *facchino*."

The wraith-like absence of weight with which the apparently empty envelope was endowed it owed to a very, very thin little slip of paper, clearly scissored out of a manuscript work, a fragment embracing two phrases out of the very heart of a sentence:

"... but, discarding their former names, he crying 'Rondolina!' she breathing: 'Oh! Enrico!', Rondolina and Enrico contrived to assume others, which had never before been used."

II

On the paving stones and the asphalt of the squares, on balconies and on the Arno embankments, the Pisans consumed the sweet-odoured Tuscan night. That murky fire made the narrow alleys under the dusty plane trees, stifling enough at best, still more oppressive, and in addition to the sultry, oily gleam of that conflagration were added the grain-shedding sheaves of the stars and those tufts of spiny cloud. And those cinders filled the cup of patience of the Italians brimful. Cursing with fanatical fire, as if uttering prayers, and merely glancing at Cassiopeia, they wiped the dusty perspiration from their foreheads. Their handkerchiefs waved in the darkness like clinical thermometers being shaken down. The indications which those cambric scales gave swept most depressingly

through the streets. They spread the stuffiness far and wide, like eavesdropped rumours, like an epidemic, like panic terror. And just as without resistance that leaning city fell apart into wards, courtyards and houses, so too did the night air turn to disparate immobilised meetings, to exclamations, disputes, sanguinary clashes, whispers, scorn and denunciations.

All these sounds lay close-laced and dusty in regular ranks about the pavement, taking root in the footwalks, like avenue trees breathless and colourless in gaslight. Thus in its whimsical, wilful way did that Pisan night rigorously ring off the contours of man's tolerance. And, but a handsbreath beyond, there began chaos. Chaos which reigned at the railway station. Where handkerchiefs and curses *exeunt*.

Those who a moment before had considered natural locomotion all but torture here hauled suitcases and holdalls, jostled at the ticket-offices and charged stampeding at sooty railway coaches, storming the steps, forcing their smut-stained way like chimney-sweeps, into compartments walled off with hot dun panelling which seemed to be warping from the heat and the swearing and that terrible battering. And the coaches blazed, the rails below them blazed, the petroleum tanks blazed and the locomotives in the sidings, the signals blazed and the steam-engulfed, flat-squashed howls of the locomotives far and near swollen with steam also blazed. Tiptoeing slow on spurts of steam, like a snorting insect the slow locomotive spat the overpowering breath of its open furnace on to the driver's cheeks and the fireman's leather tunic. The clock face burned, the cast-steel reverberation of the shunting rails and switches burned. It was all beyond the limits of human endurance. But yet all could be borne.

.

A window seat. At the final moment absolutely empty, there was the solid stone platform, there the solid stone sonority, the solid stone cry of the conductor: "*Prontii!—All away!*" And he raced past the window, chasing his own

voice. With dignity the station columns swept by. Like knitting needles lights twinkled out and intercrossed. Bright station lights flashed in at the train windows, the draught caught swiftly at them and swept them through the compartment and out on the other side, and there the iron rails caught at them and stretched them out. And they stumbled on the rails and picked themselves up again, to vanish at last behind the station sheds. Dwarf alleys, freakish mongrel little off-courts. Blustering right up to the blinds of onswEEPing gardens. Relaxed spaciousness of curly carpets of vineyards. Open country.

Travelling blind, Heine, with vacant head. Heine trying to lose himself for a moment in sleep. Heine closing his eyes.

'No doubt something will come of this. No sense in trying now to imagine what—impossible, indeed. Ahead I have complete uncertainty. So encouraging.'

Oranges, no doubt, in bloom. The sweet-scented expanse of gardens, overflowing. Whence was wafted a faint air breath, to absorb be it but one bead of moisture from the traveller's glueing lashes.

It was a certainty. Something would come of it. And how delightful too—*aaa-ah* (Heine yawning)—how delightful too any love poem of Relinquimini's would be, with that reliable trade-mark: Ferrara!

Crags, precipices, fellow-travellers sleep-broken, train reek, and the flickering light of the gas. From the ceiling licking the rustle and the shadows, then with a sigh licking its lips as the crags and the precipices surrendered to a tunnel and thundering the massif grazed the train's roof and the engine smoke was rolled to a ribbon, which clutched at the hooks and the luggage rack and drove Heine back from the window. Tunnels and valleys. The single-track line moaned mournfully over the mountain stream which broke on rocks as in darkness it came tumbling down from incredible peaks that gleamed faintly in the darkness. And there above were waterfalls, sootily smoking, all through the night their dull roar wrapping round the train.

IL TRATTO DI APELLE

'The brush-stroke of Apelles . . . Rondolfina . . .' Surely one day would not be enough. Yet that was the limit.

'I must vanish without trace. Whereas tomorrow . . . the moment he finds out from the hotel where I have gone, he will rush to the station!'

Ferrara! Blue-black, steely dawn. Sweet-scented coolth-soaked mist. O sonority of a dawn in Latium!

III

"Impossible, the next issue of *Voce* is already made up for press."

"Maybe, but on no account, not for any money in the world, will I hand over my finds. Not to anybody in the world. Nor can I stay in Ferrara more than a day."

"In the tram, you say, under the seat? His diary?"

"Yes, Emilio Relinquimini's diary! What's more, a diary which, among a mass of day-to-day jottings, also contains a great quantity of unpublished verse, a number of drafts of poems, short notes and aphorisms. A whole year's diary, in fact, mainly written, as far as one can tell by his remarks, here in Ferrara!"

"Where is it? Have you brought it with you?"

"Oh no! I left all my things at the station. The diary is locked in my luggage."

"Now, what a pity! We might have delivered it at once to his house. We have his Ferrara address in the office files—though for that matter, he has been away for the past month."

"Do you mean to assert that Relinquimini is not in Ferrara?"

"That's just the point. So I really cannot quite grasp what you hope to gain by putting an announcement of your find in the paper."

"All I hope is to be able to do—through your paper—is to make sure of meeting the owner of the diary. Surely Relinquimini should at any time be able to count on the courtesy of *Voce* in such a matter?"

"How persistent you are, sir! Pray be seated. Perhaps you would kindly write out the little advertisement you have in mind."

"I am sorry indeed to be such a great nuisance, but may I use your phone a moment?"

"Why, of course you may. At your service!"

"Hello! Is that the *Albergo Torquato Tasso*? Yes? Can you tell me if you have any room left? On which floor? Excellent, then I'll take *Number eight*."

FOUND Text, prepared for printer, of new book by Emilio Relinquimini. Will the owner or his representative call up to 11 p.m. on the occupant of Room No. 8 in the *Albergo Torquato Tasso*, who will be expecting him. From tomorrow on the Editorial Office of *Voce* and the management of the *Albergo* in question will regularly and in good time be informed by the advertiser of every change in his address.

Tired from his journey, Heine slept like a log. At last, warmed by the breath of morning, the Venetian blinds of his room glowed like the brass reeds of a mouth-organ. Under the window a network of the sun's rays spread across the floor like a straw mat. Pressing close, hugging one another, the blades of straw all ran together. Outside, indecipherable talking began, a man getting so excited that he was quite tongue-tied.

An hour passed. By now the blades of straw had fused and the mat had turned into a pool of sunshine. Outside, the talkers were getting excited, pecking at each other, till they were quite tongue-tied.

Heine slept on. The pool of sunlight grew emaciated, as if soaking into the parquet flooring. Again it was a mat growing thinner, a mat made of straw stalks, pleated and smouldering.

Heine slept on. Talking outside. Hours passing, hours idly springing up, hours growing longer, like the black gaps between the straws of the mat.

Talking outside. The mat began to fade. The mat became dusty. The mat grew dull. Now but a string mat tossed, tumbled

there, weft and woof and knotting all indistinguishable. And talking outside.

And Heine asleep.

Any moment, now, the awakening. At any moment now Heine will leap to his feet—mark my words! At any moment. Only let him see his dream out to the end. . . .

Dried out by the heat, the wheel suddenly split to the very nave, fanning its out-thrust spokes, a quiver of cut spikes, the little wagon shattered clattering, lurching to one side. Bundles of newspapers tipped out—crowds, parasols, shop windows, marquises—stretcher-borne, the delivery boy. Only a stone's throw away, a dispensing chemist's.

You see! What did I say?

Heine leaps to his feet.

"Just a moment!"

At the door, somebody knocking, impatiently, wildly knocking.

Tousled and bleary and dreamy, Heine grabs at his gown.

"So sorry, just a moment!"

With almost metallic clank, right foot, to the floor.

"Just a moment. Ah, there we are!"

Heine goes to the door.

"Who is there?"

An hotel porter's voice.

"Yes, yes, I have the diary. Please ask the *Signora* to excuse me a moment. Is she in the lounge?"

The man's voice.

"Please ask the *Signorina* if she could possibly wait about ten minutes. In ten minutes' time I shall be entirely at her service. Do you hear me?"

The man's voice.

"Wait a moment, *cameriere!*"

The man's voice.

"Don't forget to tell *Mademoiselle* that the *Signor* expresses his unlimited regret that he is unable to come to her immediately, he feels most guilty, but he will endeavour—are you listening, *cameriere!*"

The man's voice.

"He will endeavour in ten minutes' time to erase his unforgivable neglect to the full. Only, *cameriere*, please, be as courteous as you can. After all, I am not a Ferraran."

The man's voice.

"Very well, very well."

"*Cameriere*, have you shown the lady into the lounge?"

"Yes, *Signor*."

"Is she alone there?"

"Alone, *Signor*. Waiting for you, *Signor*. The first door on the left, *Signor*. On the left."

"Good afternoon. How may I be at your service, *Madame*?"

"Are you the gentleman staying in room number eight, sir?"

"I am that person."

"I have come to fetch Mr Relinquimini's diary."

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Heinrich Heine."

"I beg your pardon, sir. . . . Are you any relation . . . to . . . er?"

"Not in the least. Purely coincidental, my name. Rather embarrassing, indeed. . . . Because I, too . . ."

"You are a poet, too?"

"I have never written anything else."

"I know German and poetry is my great relaxation, but yet . . ."

"Do you happen to know a little book called *Lines Never Published During the Poet's Lifetime*?"

"But of course I do. So you are the author of that, are you?"

"Forgive me, it is my great aspiration to learn your name."

"I am Camilla Ardenze."

"I am most enchanted. . . . So you noticed my advertisement in today's *Voce*, did you, *Signora* Ardenze?"

"But of course. About this diary you have found. Where is it? Will you let me have it, please?"

"*Signora! Signora* Camilla! Perhaps with all that heart of yours, which the incomparable Relinquimini has enshrined in verse—"

"That, *Signor* Heine, is quite enough. *We* are not on the stage—"

"*Signora*, you are mistaken, all our life we are on the stage, though rare the person who can achieve that naturalness of performance with which we are each of us endowed at birth.

"*Signora* Camilla, you love your native city, you love Ferrara. Yet this is the first town that definitely repels me. You, however, are lovely, *Signora* Camilla, and my heart shrinks at the mere notion that you should be in secret connivance with this city, against myself."

"I simply do not understand——"

"*Signora*, do not interrupt me. With the town, I was saying, that drugged me so, just as a poisoner drugs his bottle companion, when his happiness brings him to the poisoner, drugging him in order to stir up a spark of scorn for the poor man in the eyes of that happiness when she comes to the tavern, whereupon happiness deceives the drugged one. '*Milady*,' says the poisoner to the woman who enters, 'just look at this idle fellow! This is the man you have lavished your love on. He whiled away his time of waiting with stories of you, and their spurs speared my imagination. I suppose you rode here on its back? Why did you lash it so mercilessly with your slender crop? It is all in a lather, it is over-heated.

"'Oh, those stories! But try not to look at him. *Milady*, he has been drugged to sleep by his own stories about you—see for yourself, absence from you works like a lullaby on your beloved! Yet we can waken him.' 'You should not,' comes the reply of the poisoned man's happiness to the poisoner. 'Don't, do not disturb him,' it says, 'he is sleeping so sweetly, perhaps he is even dreaming about me. Far better find me a glass of good toddy. It is so cold outside. I am frozen through. Please massage my hands for me . . .'"

"You are a very strange person, Mr Heine. But please go on, I find your high fancy intriguing."

"Sorry, so long as you don't forget about Relinquimini's diary. I'll run up to my room. . . ."

"Please don't worry, I shall not forget that. Do go on. How interesting you are! Do please continue. Massage my hands for me — which, I gather, was uttered by happiness?"

"That is so, *Signora* Camilla. You have been most attentive. Thank you "

"And so?"

"Well, just that this city has treated me as the poisoner the man who drank in his company, and you, lovely Camilla, you are on its side. It eavesdropped on my thoughts of dawns ancient and crumbling as bandits' castles and as lonely, and it drugged me so as silyly to use them and have me babble about galleons under full sail from the scarlet air of evening fast running out to the open night, and so, you see, unfurled those sails, but left me sprawling in the harbour tavern, and here are you, the moment the crafty rascal so suggests to you, refusing to let it waken me."

"My dear man, come, come, do please explain what I have to do with all this. Or did the hotel servant not really quite waken you up?"

"No, you will say, night's drawing nigh, lest there's a storm, we must hurry, it's high time, don't waken him."

"Ah, *Signor* Heine, how profoundly mistaken you are! Why, what I will say is, yes, yes, Ferrara, shake him up, if he's still asleep, I've no time to spare, waken him as quickly as you can, gather all your crowds, make all your squares re-echo, till at last you do waken him, utterly, there's no time to be lost."

"Yes, of course, that diary . . . !"

"After, after . . ."

"Ah, dear *Signora*, Ferrara has made a great miscalculation. Ferrara is fooled, the poisoner's in flight, I am waking, I am utterly awake—on my knees at your feet! My love!"

Camilla Ardenze leapt to her feet.

"Enough! Enough! True, it all suits you well. Even the well-worn phrases. Especially the well-worn phrases. But you really must not, you know! Why, you are merely a wandering play-actor. We scarcely know one another. It was only half an hour ago . . . Yes, Good Heavens! I find it funny even to think of it—and yet—and yet I am discussing it, you see. I never felt so silly in all my life before. This whole scene, just like a Japanese flower, opening up the moment it touches water. Neither more

nor less. But do remember, they are only paper flowers. And so cheap!"

"I am all attention, *Signora*."

"*Signor*, I would rather listen to you. You are very wise, even sarcastic, I rather think. And yet not afraid of stooping to well-worn phrases. Strange, yet not contradictory. Your histrionic pathos . . ."

"Pardon me, *Signora*, but *pathos* is a Greek word, in the original signifying passion, but in Italian only a blown kiss. Perforce kisses so light . . ."

"Again, sir! I must declare, this is insufferable! You have some secret purpose. Please explain yourself! But please, my dear Mr Heine, do not be angry with me. In spite of it all you—you will not be annoyed with me if I am outspoken?—you are a most weird—er—child. No, even that is not quite the right word. Yes—you are a poet. Of course! However did I fail to find the words at once, all one need do is take one look at you. One of Providence's chosen idlers, a spoiled child of—good fortune."

"*Evviva!*"

Crying this, Heine leapt lightly to the window-sill and leant far out.

"Oh, do be careful, *Signor* Heine!" cried Camilla. "Do please be careful, I am so afraid for you!"

"You need not fear, dear *Signora*."

"Oh, *furfante* [rascal]! Catch!"

Liras fly out, into the square.

"There, you'll get as much, even ten times the amount, if you plunder as many Ferrara gardens. A *soldo* for every hole in your trousers. Off with you! Only take care, when you bring in the flowers, don't breathe on them, the countess has the sensitivity of mimosa. Off with you, mountebank!"

"Enchantress, did you hear? The lad will come back attired as a cupid. Well, to business. But what perspicacity! By one stroke of the brush, one stroke of Apelles, to reveal my whole self, the very essence of the situation."

"I don't understand you. Or is this a fresh way out? More histrionics? Or what exactly is it you want?"

"Yes, histrionics again. Yet why not let me spend a few moments under the arc-lights' glare? After all, I am not to blame, am I, if in life it is the most dangerous sites that are most brilliantly lighted—the temporary planking, the gangways? What brilliance! All else is plunged in darkness."

On such boards—yes, even if they are the boards of a stage—a man catches alight, lit by uneasy fires, as if made an example for all, railed round with barriers, by the panorama of the city, with whirlpools and lighthouses.

"*Signora* Camilla, you would not give heed to half my words, had you and I not come together in so perilous a place. It is perilous. That we must assume, although I myself am not conscious of it. We must assume so because men have spent endless sums on fire to light it up, and it is not my fault if we are illuminated so crudely, so harshly."

"Very well, then. Have you finished? All you say is so. Yet, you know, it is all such incredible nonsense. I would like to trust you. No mere whim, that. Almost a necessity in me. You are not lying. Your eyes do not lie. Yes, but what now was it that I wanted to say to you . . . ? It has slipped from my mind. . . . Just a moment. . . . Ah, yes. . . . Listen, my dear friend—after all, only an hour since——"

"Stop! Mere words! There are hours and there are eternities. Very many but not one that has any beginning. They reveal themselves all at once, at the first favourable moment. And that is chance itself. And then—down with words! *Signora*, when and by whom are they overthrown? Down with words! Have you ever encountered such rebellions, *Signora*? *Signora*—all my fibres rise against me, and I am obliged to yield to them, as one yields to a crowd. And here is one final point: do you remember what you called me just now?"

"Of course I do. I am prepared to call you that a second time."

"You should not. Yet you are able to look with such life-giving force. And you are already master of a brush-stroke as unique as life itself. Only do not let it slip from your grasp, do not load it either on to me, hold it back as long as it will let you. Take that line farther away."

"What is the result, *Signora*? How have you come out? Side-view? Or three-quarters? Or, if neither, how?"

"I see what you mean."

Camilla held out her hand to Heine.

"And all the same . . . No, Good Heavens, I am not a mere schoolgirl. I must pull myself together. This is like hypnosis."

"*Signora*," cried Heine, theatrically, now at Camilla's feet. "*Signora!*" he repeated, in a choking voice, hiding his face in his hands. "Have you finished your brush-stroke?"

"Oh, what torture!" half whispering, he gasped, tearing his hands away from his cheeks, which had suddenly become bloodless. . . . And then, peering into the eyes of *Signora* Ardenze, who was more and more losing her self-control, to his inexpressible amazement he observed that . . .

IV

. . . that this woman was indeed beautiful, beautiful beyond conception, that the beating of his own heart, which was like seas surging in the wake of a ship, was growing in strength, breaking now over knees drawing ever nearer and in slow high-piling waves flooding over her body, about her silks lapping, drawing deep and still over her shoulders, till it reached her chin and, in wonder, was raising it slightly higher, raising it higher still, till this *signora* was up to the throat in his heart, and one more such wave and she would be utterly drowned there. And Heine seized the drowning woman—a kiss, and what a kiss, a kiss which, even though it groaned a great groan from the strain of their wild, pulsating hearts, swept them both off their feet, plucking them up and soaring with them into far distant, lofty spaces, no matter whither, merely to be away, away, and she made no resistance, oh none at all. Indeed, her kiss-drawn, kiss-compelled, kiss-ecstatic body, sang—if you will then I an argosy shall be of such kissing, only to be borne away, she borne away, me borne away!

"Somebody's . . . knocking!" hoarsely broke from Camilla's breast.

"Somebody's knocking!"
And she tore from his embrace.
And she was right

.
"A thousand devils! Who's that?"

"*Signor*, you should not lock the lounge door. It is not permitted."

"Hold your tongue! I can do as I please."

"You are ill, sir."

Oaths, passionate, fantastic Italian oaths, like a liturgical rite. Heine unlocked the door. In the corridor stood an hotel servant, still muttering. Behind him, a few paces back, was a young lad, very ragged, his head lost in an absolute jungle of jasmine and branches of oleander and orange-blossom and lilies . . .

"This rascal . . .

. . . and roses and magnolia blossom and carnations. . . .

"This rascal . . . tried to insist on being allowed into the room with windows facing the square, the only such room being the lounge . . ."

"Yes, yes, into the lounge," cried this bull-voiced, guttural whipper-snapper.

"Of course, into the lounge," Heine agreed. "Those were my own instructions to him."

" . . . because," the hotel servant resumed, impatiently, "he could have no business in the office, or the bathrooms, let alone in the library. However, considering the completely unsuitable condition of his attire . . ."

"Oh yes, of course!" cried Heine, as if he had only this moment woken up. "Rondolfina, just look at his trousers! Whoever made those trousers for you, from fish-net, you transparent creature?"

"*Signor*, the prickly thorns of the Ferrara hedges are trimmed every year by seasonal gardeners."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

" . . . Seeing the completely unsuitable condition of his

attire," the hotel servant now impatiently resumed, and he lent special emphasis to the word *attire* because of the *signora's* joining them, her features clouded with sudden incomprehension struggling with rays of utterly irrepressible gaiety, "... seeing the completely unsuitable condition of his attire, we asked the lad to hand to us what the gentleman had ordered and wait for an answer outside. But the young scoundrel——"

"Yes, of course, he was quite right to insist"—Heine halted the eloquent fellow—"you see, I told him he was to present himself to the *Signorina* in person——"

"... this young scoundrel," bellowed the hot-tempered Calabrian, completely losing control of himself, "began to utter threats."

"And what exactly did he threaten you with?" Heine enquired. "How picturesque, isn't it, *Signora*?"

"The ragged fellow referred us to you. The *Signor*, he threatened, the *Signor* is a business man and when he comes through Ferrara again he would make use of other hotels, if, in spite of the *Signor's* orders, we did not allow the young rascal to go to him."

"Ha, ha, ha! What a funny fellow! Isn't he, *Signora*? Now take this tropical plantation away—no, wait"—and Heine turned to Camilla for her instructions. "Take it to room number eight, for the time being," he continued, without waiting for her answer.

"To your room, for the time being," Camilla repeated, blushing slightly.

"Very well, *Signor*. But as for this lad. . . ."

"Yes, you, you baboon, what price do you put on those trousers?"

"Giulio all scars, Giulio blue wiz cold, Giulio ha'n't got any other clothes, Giulio ha'n't got no dad, no mum," whined the ten-year-old young ragamuffin, coming out into a sweat.

"Well, hurry up, give me a straight answer; what price?"

"A hundred *soldi*, *Signor*," said the lad, hesitantly, dreamily, speaking like one mesmerized.

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Everybody guffawed. Heine guffawed, Camilla guffawed,

the hotel servant broke into guffaws, he in particular when, taking out his note-case, Heine pulled out a ten-lira note and, still laughing, handed it to the tatterdemalion

Like a flash of lightning, out shot the boy's hand and snatched the money.

"Just a moment," Heine said. "I expect this is your first effort in commerce. Just in the nick of time. . . . Here, my man," he turned to the hotel servant, "let me assure you that in this case your laughter is definitely unseemly. It is wounding this young business man and, besides, am I not right, young man, in assuming that from now on in your business operations you will never again set foot in this inhospitable *albergo*?"

"But of course not, *Signor*, on the contrary. . . . But how many more days are you staying in Ferrara?"

"In two hours' time I leave this city for ever."

.

"*Signor Enrico* . . ."

"Yes, *Signora*?"

"Let us go outside, we surely are not going back into that stupid lounge?"

"Very well. . . . Boots—take these flowers up to number eight, will you? Just a moment, this rose still needs to open fully. For this evening the gardens of Ferrara consign it to you, *Signora*."

"Thank you very much, Enrico. . . . And this swarthy carnation lacks any sense of self-control—*Signor*, the gardens of Ferrara consign this harum-scarum blossom to your care."

"Give me your dainty hand, *Signora*, to kiss! . . . So take these to number eight, my man. And bring me down my hat. You will find it in my room."

The man withdrew.

"Enrico, you will not do this."

"I do not quite follow, Camilla."

"You will stay on here? . . . Oh, please do not answer me back. . . . You will stay, won't you? At least for the day . . .

here in Ferrara. . . . Enrico, Enrico, you have dusted your forehead with pollen, let me brush it clean for you."

"*Signora* Camilla, I see a caterpillar on your shoe. . . . I will brush it off. I will telegraph home to Frankfort. And your frock is all petals, *Signora*—and I will go on telegraphing till you tell me not to "

"Enrico, I see there is no engagement ring on your finger. Have you ever put one on?"

"But on the other hand, long since I noticed that you wear one, Camilla. . . . Ah yes, my hat. Thank you."

V

The sweet-scented evening, penetrating into every corner of Ferrara, trickled in sonorous drops throughout the city's labyrinthine streets, just as a drop of sea-water, stealing its way into one's ear, fills one's whole head with deafness.

It was noisy in the café. But leading to it was a tiny alley which was silent and incorporeal, and the principal reason for this was that as the deafened, stupefied city enclosed it in, its tense walls held their breath. Thus evening sheltered in that narrow urban walk, in precisely this alley, with the café at the corner.

While she waited for Heine, Camilla began to wonder. He had gone to the telegraph office, which was next door to the café. Why, she wondered, had he so positively refused to write his telegram at the hotel and let a servant go to the post office to send it off? Surely it was not possible that he could not be content with a plain, formal message? Was it some very powerful bond, a bond of pure emotion? Yet, on the other hand, she recalled, he would have forgotten all about sending it, had she not reminded him. But whoever could Rondolfina be? She would have to ask him about that. But could she do so? After all, it would be a rather intimate question, wouldn't it?

'Good gracious,' she said to herself, 'I am just like a school-girl. I can, and I must. Today I acquire the right to anything, today I lose all rights. My dear girl, these actors have played

havoc with you. But this one. . . . Then what about Relinquimini? . . . How far-off his image! As far off as the Spring? Oh no, much farther off than that! A New Year's Eve? . . . But of course not, he was never really close to me. . . . Whereas this man? . . ."

"A penny for your thoughts, Camilla!"

"But why are you so downcast, Enrico? Don't you be sad: I release you. There are telegrams that hotel-servants can take down to dictation. Send one of those. You have only delayed your departure three hours. There is a night train to Venice and another night train to Milan. Your lateness will not exceed . . ."

"What is the point of all this, Camilla?"

"Why are you so downcast, Enrico? Now tell me something about Rondolfina."

With a violent start, Heine sprang to his feet.

"Who told you about Rondolfino? Is he here? He has been here in my absence! Where is he, where is he, Camilla?"

"You are pale, Enrico. . . . And of whom do you speak? I was asking you about a woman—Rondolfina. Was I not? Or did I pronounce her name wrongly? Is it then Rondolfino? It all hangs on one vowel, doesn't it? Do sit down . . . people are staring."

"Who told you about her? Have you had news from him? But in what way? How did it get here? After all, we are in this place purely by chance, I mean, surely nobody *knows* we are here?"

"Enrico, nobody has been here and nothing whatever occurred while you were at the post office. I swear it. But with every minute the situation does become more curious. . . . So there are two such persons, are there?"

"Then it is a miracle! Beyond comprehension. . . . Utterly beyond me! Camilla, who put that name into your mind? Where did you first hear it?"

"Last night. In my sleep. Heavens, that is such an ordinary thing! But you still have not answered me: who exactly is this Rondolfina? Miracles have not vanished from the world—let us leave miracles alone—Enrico, who exactly is she?"

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"Ah, Camilla, but of course, you are Rondolfina!"

"Oh, you false, lying pretender! No . . . no . . . let me be! Don't you dare touch me!"

They were now both on their feet. Camilla—with one movement—was transformed, to lightning, irrevocable agility. Only the café table was between them. She clutched the back of a chair as something rose up between her and her own decision, as something invaded her and the whole café, like roundabouts at the fair, whirled the whole place in a swirling wave, up, up, at an angle. . . . And fell, a victim. . . . Irresistible, that lance, in her body, for ever. . . .

All part of the queasy whirling furrow of the fair-world, with faces, wild concatenation, flowing past. . . . Spanish beards. . . . Monocles. . . . Opera glasses. . . . With every second ever more; all pointing at her. The talk at all tables pointed to theirs. She could still see him, she still resisting . . . this might pass off. . . . Not so the orchestra disjointed . . . off the beat. . . .

"Waiter, water!"

VI

Slightly feverish.

"What a tiny, tiny room yours is. . . . Yes, yes, that's just right, thank you. I'll lie still a little while longer. It's malaria—besides . . . I have a flat for us. But you should not leave me. It may break over me at any moment. Enrico!"

"Yes, darling?"

"Whyever are you so silent? No, no, don't, better so. . . . Oh, Enrico, I can't even remember whether there was any morning today. Are they still not falling?"

"Are what, Camilla?"

"The flowers."

"They will have to be put outside during the night. How heavy the scent! How many tons of it are there?"

"I will have them taken away. . . . What are you going to do, Camilla?"

"I am going to get up. . . . Yes, I can manage, thank you. See, it's all passed off, I only needed to get up . . . Yes, they

BORIS PASTERNAK

will have to be put outside. . . . But wherever? No, wait, I have a big flat of my own, in Ariosto Square. You can probably see it from here. . . ."

"It's already dark. The air, I think, is a little fresher."

"Why are there so few people about?"

"Sh! Every word can be heard."

"What are they talking about?"

"I don't know, Camilla. I think they are students. Boasting of some sort. Perhaps of the same thing as ourselves. . . ."

"Do let me go! They've stopped at the corner there! Heavens, he's tossed that little fellow over his head! Now it's all quiet again. How eerily the light does cling to the tree-tops! And no street-lamp to be seen. Are we not on the top one?"

"What's that, Camilla?"

"Is there another floor above us?"

"Yes, I think there is."

Camilla thrust her head out of the little window and her eye followed the overhanging raceme up to its branch.

"No. . . ." But Heine tried to stop her. "There isn't," she repeated, as she broke away from him.

"What are you getting at?"

"I had the impression that somebody was standing there, with a lamp at the window, crumbling the leaves and the shadows and throwing them out into the street, and I wanted to hold up my face, so that they fell on my cheeks. But there really is nobody there."

"But this is real poetry, Camilla!"

"Really? I cannot say. There—standing there—over there—near the theatre. Where that lilac-hued glow is."

"Who is standing there, Camilla?"

"You funny boy! Not *who*, but my house, of course."

"Yes. But these are whims. . . . If we could but somehow arrange . . ."

"A room has been booked for you."

"Really? How thoughtful! At last! What is the time? Let

IL TRATTO DI APELLE

us be going. Let us go and see what sort of a room I've got. I'd love to see "

They left No. 8, both smiling and excited as schoolchildren besieging Troy in a timber yard.

VII

Quite a long time before it broke, the Catholic church bells, bowing frigidly all about them, in bursts of sudden clanging from tumbling belfry beams, loquaciously began to herald the approach of the new day. In the inn only one small lamp was alight, and when the telephone bell, suddenly strident, rang, this flared up, not to be dimmed again after. And was witness to the night porter's scurrying across the hall to the telephone and after a brief argument with the caller replacing the receiver and vanishing down a dark corridor, only to reappear a short time after, surfacing from the same bosom of twilight.

"Yes, the gentleman is leaving this morning, he will call you back, if it is so urgent. In half an hour's time. Please let me have your number. Whom are we to ask for?"

The little lamp burned on, even when, buttoning his clothes as he went, with night-time, tiptoe gait, called to the telephone, the occupant of No. 8 emerged from the side corridor into the main one.

The little lamp happened to be exactly opposite the door of that room, but in spite of that to get to the telephone the man from No. 8 went for a corridor walk, and the first part of that expedition lay somewhere in the region of the eighties. After a brief interchange with the night porter, whose face changed its expression at once, the anxious excitement giving way to sudden lack of concern plus curiosity, he boldly took up the receiver and after the usual formalities established contact with his correspondent, in the form of the editor of *Voce*.

"I must say, this is impious! Who told you I suffer from insomnia?"

BORIS PASTERNAK

"Haven't you taken the telephone by mistake? You need the church tower! What's the great news? Come on, what is it?"

"Yes, I have stayed on one day longer."

"Yes, the hotel is quite right, I have not given them my home address and I do not intend to."

"You? No, you shall not have it, either. No, I have never for a moment contemplated publishing it, let alone today, as you seem to have got into your head."

"You cannot possibly ever need it."

"My dear sir, please do not get excited. Altogether, the calmer you remain, the better. It will not even occur to Relinquimini to seek your intervention."

"Because he has no need for it."

"Once again let me point out how much I would value a little calmness on your part. Relinquimini never lost any sort of diary."

"Look here!—though this is the first unambiguous thing you have said. . . . No, one hundred per cent: no!"

"Again? Very well, if you like. But this is blackmail. Only within the limits of yesterday evening's issue of your *Voce*—which is far from being the same thing farther afield."

"Since yesterday evening. Since six p.m."

"Had you but indirectly got a whiff of what has frothed up on the yeast of that invention, you would look around for a rather sharper name for it, and it would be still farther from the truth than what you have just suggested to me."

IL TRATTO DI APELLE

"Willingly. With pleasure I can see no obstacles today
.. Heinrich Heine "

"Precisely that."

"I am most flattered to hear it "

"You don't say so!"

"Very glad to. How are we to achieve that? I am sorry, I
really must travel today. Come down to the station, we can
spend a moment together."

"Nine thirty-five. Though all time is a concatenation of
surprises. I don't think you had better come."

"Come to the *albergo*. In the afternoon. That will be more
certain. Or come and see me at the flat. In the evening. Tails,
please. And flowers."

"Yes. Yes, my dear sir, you are quite a Delphic figure."

"Then tomorrow, on some duelling ground, outside the city."

"Hm! But . . . perhaps I am not joking."

"Or, if you're busy, both today and tomorrow. All day.
Come—yes, look here, come to *Campo Santo* the day after
tomorrow."

"You think so?"

"You think so?"

"What a strange conversation, neither real daylight nor
twilight. Well, good-bye now. I'm tired. I want to get back
to my room."

BORIS PASTERNAK

"I didn't quite catch? To room number eight? Oh, why yes. Yes, yes, number eight. It's a long room, my dear sir, with a very special climate inside. For five hours now it has been eternal Spring time Good morning to you, sir!"

Mechanically, Heine whirled the handle, to cut the line.

"Don't put the light out, Enrico," came a voice from the depths of the corridor.

"Is that you, Camilla?"

Letters from Tula

I

IN the open the skylarks were pouring forth their song while in a train on its way from Moscow the panting sun was carried on many a striped, upholstered seat. And the sun was setting. A bridge with the inscription *R. Ufa* flowed past the hundred windows at the same instant as the city swiftly rushing out to meet it disclosed itself to the fireman flying ahead of the train on the tender in the roar of his own shock head of hair and the freshness of the evening excitement.

In the same instant, people who met in the streets were bidding each other a good evening. To this some added:

"Have you been?"

The others answered:

"Just going."

This brought the reply:

"You're late. It's all over."

.

Tula, 10 p.m.

"So you changed over, as we fixed with the conductor. Just now the General, when he vacated his place and went to the bar, nodded to me as if we were old friends. The next train Moscow way will be the 3 a.m. He was bidding me good-bye, as he left. The porter opened the door for him. I could hear the cabbies outside. Like sparrows, from a distance. Darling, it was awful, seeing you off. Now you're gone, it's ten times worse. No curb now on my imagination. It will fret me to death. A tram's just coming. They're switching it over now. I

shall go and have a look at the town. What yearning! If only I could crush it, stifle it. It's so fierce I shall write and write. My verse."

Tula

"Oh, there's no middle way. At the second bell one should turn and go. Or else get into the train with the person one's seeing off, and go to the very end, to the grave. Think, it will be getting light when I do the whole journey back, stage by stage, in reverse, in every detail too, even the smallest. And all will then be fine points of exquisite torture.

"What a misfortune, to be born a poet! What a torturer imagination is! Sunshine—in a bottle of beer. A sediment on the very bottom of the bottle. Opposite me at my table there's a farm bailiff or something of the sort. Ruddy-faced. Stirring his coffee with green fingers. Oh, darling girl, I am surrounded by strangers. There was one witness, now gone (the General). There is one other—that magistrate—they won't recognize me. Mean minds. The creatures think they can lap up their sunshine, out of a saucer with their milk. They think their flies don't drown in yours, the cooks' pans clatter, the soda-water hisses and the coppers chink on the marble as if they had their own language. I'm going to stroll round and have a look at the town. Some distance from the station. There is a tram, but not worth it. About forty minutes walk, I'm told. Found that receipt, you were right. Will hardly manage it tomorrow, shall need a good sleep. The day after. But don't you worry, it's the public pawnbroker, there's time. Oh, writing is just self-torture. Yet I can't bring myself to part entirely from you."

Five hours went by. The silence was striking. It became impossible to distinguish where herbage ended, coal began. A star twinkled. Not another living soul at the hydrant. The water in the wooden tank was black. On the surface quivered

LETTERS FROM TULA

the reflection of a birch-tree. Feverish. But was very distant, that. Very, very distant That birch-tree was the only soul on the road.

The silence was exceptionally dense On the flat earth lay boilers and trucks, and no breath in them They were like low storm clouds gathering on a windless night. Were it not April, there would be streak lightning. Yet the sky was uneasy. Overcome by the transparency, as if by a sickness, stirred from within too, by Spring, uneasy. The last coach of the Tula trams came in from the town. The wooden tip-over backs of the seats clattered. The last to emerge was a man with a lot of letters sticking out of the broad pockets of his loose-cut overcoat. The rest went straight into the waiting-room and made for a party of very peculiar young people noisily having supper at the far end. But the newcomer stayed this side of the façade, looking for the green blotch of a letter-box. But it was impossible to say where the herbage ended and the coal began, and when the sluggish vapour dragged the shaft over the turf and this ploughed its iron tip into the path, no dust at all rose, it was only by the lantern hanging outside the stables that he knew at all. The night then emitted a drawn-out, throaty sound. After that, all was utterly still, very, very far away, beyond the horizon.

.
Tula, 10 (crossed out) 11 p.m.

"Dear one, check in your textbook. You've got Kluchevski with you, I put it in the trunk myself. I don't know how to begin. I still can't grasp this. It's so strange. So terrible too. While I write these words, everything is going on as usual on the other side of the table. All being so clever, making speeches, tossing fine words to and fro, dramatically wiping their clean-shaven mugs, then planting their napkins demonstratively on the table. I've not explained who. The worst sort of bohemians. (Carefully crossed out.) A film-making company from Moscow. Been shooting *Ivan the Terrible etcetera*—shots in the Kremlin and anywhere else they had ramparts.

"Read what Kluchevski has to say about it—I've not read it myself, but think he's surely described the business about Bolotnikov (Pyotr). Anyway, that's what had brought them out to the Upa. Learned that they've dotted the i and shot from the far bank. Now their seventeenth century's all tucked away in their trunks, and all the rest can sprawl over a dirty tablecloth. Polish women are frightful, but scions of true Russian blue-blood a damn sight worse.

"Dearest person! It makes me want to puke. An exhibition of the ideals of our age. The foul fumes they produce, well, we're all of us responsible. Poisonous fug of boorishness and the most miserable, vulgar arrogance. Myself. Darling, I've already dropped two letters. Don't recall what I said. Here's the vocabulary of those (crossed out, rejected without substitution). Here's their vocabulary: genius, poet, fed-up, verse, nothing in him (or her) drama, woman, I—and she. How frightful to see oneself in others. All a caricature on . . . (not completed).

2 o'clock

"The heart's faith's greater than ever, I swear to you, the time will come—no, first let me tell you: torment, torment me night, not finished yet, scorch to the ground, burn, burn clear and bright, force your way through the rubble piled in, through the forgotten, furious, fiery word 'conscience'. (This underlined, the pen in places tearing through the paper.) Oh blaze, you furious crude oil tongue of flame, lighting the floor of the night.

"That's the sort of shape life's taken on our earth, ever since the world lost any points at which a man might warm his soul with the fire of shame; shame, universally, now sodden, refuses to burn at all. Lies, and chaotic loss of clear ways. It began thirty years ago, since when any a bit out of the usual run, old or young, spend their whole lives damping down shame. Now it has spread to the whole world, even the utterly unknown. For the first, for the very first time since remotest childhood fire is consuming me (all crossed out)."

LETTERS FROM TULA

A fresh attempt. The letter is never sent.

"How describe it to you? I shall have to start from the end. Or it won't work. Right—only let me put it in the third person. I did write about the individual who went strolling past the luggage platform, didn't I? Right, then. A poet, from now on indicated by that designation, till fire purges him, a poet in inverted commas, a 'poet,' that is, observes himself in a party of actors letting rip on a stage revelative of the comrades and the age alike. Is he just playing about? No. He's assured the identification is no chimera. They get up and approach him. Call him 'colleague', just to ask if he's got small change for a three-rouble piece. He disseminates the illusion. It isn't only actors who shave. Produces three roubles' worth of twenty-copeck pieces. Marks himself off from the actor. Not the shaved physiognomies that matter. It was that word *colleague* on the lips of such rats. Indeed. And he was right. Practical manifestation of the indictment. At the same moment something new happened, merest trifle, in its own way shattering to all taking place or gone through in that restaurant up to that moment.

"The 'poet' recognized the man walking up and down in the luggage hall. Seen his face somewhere, some time. Somewhere local. Not once only, not today, or merely a particular day, but various moments, in various places. When they made up that special train, for instance, at Astapovo, with a luggage wagon as tomb, and the crowd of unknowns were all leaving the station in a variety of trains, which were all criss-crossing and trying to link up one with another all day long because of the unforeseen events at that complicated junction where four main lines came together and intercrossed and turned back again and went their ways.

"Here in a flash, realization seizes on all that happened to the 'poet' in the restaurant, like a lever switching to another scene, as follows: of course, it was Tula! Of course, it was night. Night-time at Tula. Night in passages of the Tolstoy story. Was it astonishing if the compass needles began to hop about? What happened was in the nature of the place. It was an event on the *territory of conscience*, its lodestone-bearing, gravity-

making part. That's the end of the 'poet' He swears it to you. He swears to you that some day, when he sees *Ivan the Terrible* on the screen (after all, that will in due course come about) the sequence on the Upa will leave him utterly isolated, unless by then the actors mend their ways, unless some day they can spend a whole day dancing about on a mine-sown territory of the spirit and yet remain untouched in their boorishness and boasting, dreamers in every sense."

While these lines were being penned, lights appeared from huts, low-down, at sleeper level, and wound their way along the tracks. Whistles sounded. Cast iron was awakened, twisted chains cried out. Past the loading ramp slowly slipped the coaches. Had long been slipping, goods trucks without end. And behind them, looming larger, the approach of something that breathed hard, an unknown night creature. Because crash after crash in the trail of the locomotive suddenly approaching came a clearing of tracks, the unexpected advent of night within the horizon of the empty loading ramp, the advent of silence throughout the world of signals and stars—the oncoming of peace in the open country. And in this moment of time there was a hoarse breathing behind the goods train, ever nearer, sliding up, under the station roofing.

While these lines were being written, they had begun to make up the mixed goods-and-passenger to Yeletz.

The writer had come out on to the platform. It was night, throughout the vast marsh of the Russian conscience. Night illuminated by lanterns. Through it, the rails bending under them, slowly crept open trucks with winnowing gear under canvas. The shadows trampled down the night, silencing the tufty steam breaking like barn-door cocks from the valves. The writer came round the far side of the station. Beyond the façade.

While those lines were penned, nothing had changed, throughout the spaces of conscience. From it all rose a reek of mould and mud. In the far distance, hazily showing, a birch-tree, and the outline of the water tank, fallen pearl in a sea of mud. Strips of light broke from the restaurant into the free air and fell on the floor of the tram-car, beneath the seats.

LETTERS FROM TULA

They grew turbulent, in their wake the clash of beer and folly and foul smells, splashing with the light under the seats. And when the station windows died down, somewhere close could be heard hoarse breath and snoring. He had by now forgotten with whom he had travelled here, to whom he had bid farewell, to whom he had been writing. It seemed to him now that everything would begin again from the point at which he ceased to hear himself. And there was at last complete, physical silence in his soul. Not an Ibsen silence, but an *acoustical* silence.

So he thought. Then a shudder passed through his body. The east turned grey, and hurried, flustered dew settled on all the face of conscience deep engulfed still in profoundest night. It was time to think about his ticket. The cocks were crowing, and there was somebody in the ticket office.

II

Only then, at last, in the town, an extremely strange elderly man prepared for bed in an inn in Posolskaya Street. While letters were being written at the station, that hotel room shivered from feathered footsteps, and the candle in the window caught a whisper frequently broken by silence. It was not the voice of the elderly man, although there was nobody else but him in the room. All this was most peculiar.

The elderly man had spent a most unusual day. As soon as he had found out that it was no play, but for the time being no more than free flight of fancy which would only turn into a play when shown at the *Chary*, he turned away most disappointed. At first sight of those medieval nobles and *voyvodes* milling about on the far shore and a crowd of common folk involving chain-mail headpieces knocked off their heads into the nettles, at sight of those Poles hanging on to the laburnums on the cliff face and their battle-axes so unresponsive to the sunshine and so unringing, the elderly man had begun rummaging in his own repertoire. But found no such chronicle there. And then decided this must be before his

period, it was Ozerov or Sumarokov, at which point somebody pointed out the cameraman to him and by mentioning the *Chary* picture-house, an institution which he heartily detested, reminded him that he was old and isolated in a new age. And he went on his way, most depressed.

On he trudged in his well-worn nankeen trousers and reflected that now there was nobody left who would call him *Sava old man*. It was a festive sort of day. Scattered debris of sunflower seeds. He basked in it. Spitting and dribbling a collar of husks, through throaty mutter, new speech in old. High up the spongy roll of the melting moon. Cold-seeming sky, amazed to be so distant. Voices fruity by food and drink consumed. That chantarelle, that rye round loaf, that smoked fat bacon and that vodka soaked even into the echo which heady swam beyond the river. In other streets were crowds, pock-marked the skirts and women too with clumsy pleats.

And dogged their steps close-heeled the tall steppe-grass. Soft rose the mist of dust, eyelids were glued, the burdock palms to silt, in whorls the wattle through, to girls' frocks clinging close. His walking-stick perceived the fragmented sclerotics of his age. And on that extension of his now knotted fibres leant his spasmodic, grown cautious gouty frame.

.

All that day he had had the feeling of being mixed up in crowds which were excessively noisy. The consequence, of course, of the sight he had seen. Which left his need for dramatic human speech unrequited. And that untalkative blankness rang in the old man's ears.

All the day he had felt ill since from that far bank he had not heard a single pentameter.

And when night came at last, sat down at a table, propped head on hand and deep sank into thought. And decided this was the end of him. So unlike his recent years, unwavering bitter as they were, was this soul turmoil. And resolved to take his decorations out of the cupboard and warn somebody, were it only the man at the door (no matter whom), but instead

LETTERS FROM TULA

sat on, waiting to see, perhaps it was only a passing mood, it would pass.

Past him, shadow-sly, the tram bobbed by. The last tram to the station

A half hour since. The star gleamed bright. No other soul in sight. Quite late, now, it was. A candle, guttering, flickering faint. And the outlines of the shelving shimmered to life and soft subsided to four streams of blackness. Far off, far off. Outside, a door banged, soft and excited, voices sprang up, seemly on such a night of spring, with not a soul about, only overhead, one lighted room, one open casement.

The ageing man stood up. Transformed. At last! And time too! Found—her and himself! Helped to it. And hastened to lend his hand to those hints, to let not one slip from him, to soak himself in them. And then relax. With a few steps he reached the door, eyes half closed, waving one hand, the other on his chin. Recalling. And all at once stood erect and cheerfully strolled back, with gait not his, another's. Clearly acting a part.

.

"What a hurricane, oh, what a hurricane, my dear Liubov Petrovna," he declared.

Then cleared his throat, and spat into his handkerchief. And again:

"What a hurricane, oh, what a hurricane it is, my dear girl!"

And this time did not cough. And it sounded more real.

He began to wave his arms and whirl about, as if coming in from a storm, shaking off the snow, taking off his fur coat. For a few moments he waited, to see what answer would come from the other side of the dividing wall, then, as if unable to wait, still in that stranger voice, demanded:

"Aren't you there, Liubov Petrovna?" and started violently when, *as was only to be expected*, from beyond that dividing wall—two and a half tens of years away—he heard the cheerful response: "Yes, I'm here."

Then, again, this time more himself, with self-deception which would have been the pride of any counterpart of himself in such position, reaching out towards the wall oh so fumblingly, with eyes askance and words disjointed all, mumbled:

"Er . . . er . . . worry . . . Liubov Petrovna. . . I suppose . . . Sava Ignatievich is not there?"

That, now, was the utter limit. Beyond. Seeing them both. Her and himself. Then, old man, with silent sobbing choked. And ticking clock. Weeping and whispering both. The silence so unusual. While, shuddering, senile, helplessly holding handkerchief to eyes and cheeks, as he shivered he crushed the rag, shaking his head and thrusting away the truth, as if giggling, yet gasping aghast with surprise that still, God forgive, he was he and not torn asunder—on the tracks of cast steel for the mixed goods-and-passenger to Yeletz to try to pick up.

For a whole hour, as in alcohol in a jar, he preserved his youth, then, when the last tear dried away, all had collapsed, all borne away, all for ever gone. At once his substance dulled, dust settled in and on. And then, at last with heavy sigh, humble in guilt, he yawned and prepared for bed.

He also shaved his moustache, as in the story too. And also, as principal person, sought physical silence. In the story solely he too found it, by making a stranger speak through his lips.

The Moscow train rolled on, its freight, on so many slumbering bodies, an immense crimson sun. This very minute risen above the swelling land and rising high.

To Mikhail Alekseyevich Kuzmin, 1924

Aerial Routes

I

PROPPING her back against the trunk, the nurse slept on under the ancient mulberry. When an enormous purple cloud rose up at the road edge, silencing even the crickets that made such sultry crackling music in the grass and in the camps the sigh of the drums finally snapped off the end, the earth's eyes dimmed, and life ceased in the world.

"Coom on! Coom on!" harelipped she yelled, the half-wit cow-girl, dragging her crushed foot in front of the steer, and, brandishing a wild branch like a lightning flash, appeared in a cloud of rubbish from the far side of the orchard, where all wild growth began, nightshades and bricks, crumpled wire and mouldy dankness.

Then vanished.

The storm-cloud swept its eye over the close-cut, scorched stubbles. Which stretched to the very skyline. Reared lightly up. The storm-cloud. The stubbles stretched farther still, even beyond the camps. Sank back to fore-feet, the storm-cloud, glided across the road, and noiselessly slipped away along the fourth rail of the railway track. And the bushes all bared their heads down the slopes of the cutting and followed after. Flowed on, bowing to the cloud. And the cloud made no answer.

From the tree the mulberries dropped. And caterpillars. Plague-stricken by heat they fell from their twigs and plopped into nurse's apron—and they ceased to think at all.

The child now crawled to the water-tap. He had been crawling for some time. He crawled on farther.

When, at last, it pours out, and both pairs of rails fly off down the leaning wattle fences, in flight from the black, watery night now lowered on to them. When, foaming and feeling its way, the water as it races by will cry out to you not to be afraid of it, it is called downpour and love and something else too, I will relate how as the sun went down the parents of the little boy kidnapped cleaned their white canvas shoes and it was very early when, snow-white, as for a round of tennis, they went through the still, dark garden and came out by the post which shows the way to the station at the very moment when the fat-bellied disc of the boiler, rolling cautious from behind the market-gardens, enveloped the Turkish confectioner's in clouds of short-breathed yellow smoke.

They were going down to the harbour to meet the midshipman who once had loved her and had been her husband's great friend and this morning after a round-the-world instructional voyage was expected to reach their town. And her husband was burning with impatience, anxious as soon as ever possible to initiate his friend into the profound significance of the fatherhood of which he still had not quite had enough. That's how things were. That so simple event struck you as if almost the very first case of the magic of its primeval significance. It was so new for you that, look! there could even be a man who had been all round the world and seen his fill of everything and, one might think, really had something to talk about, yet it seemed to you that when you at last did meet him it was he who would be audience while you staggered his comprehension with your rattle.

The very opposite of her husband, she—as the anchor is to the waves—was drawn by the metallic clank and clamour of the harbour, by the brownish rust of those three-funnel giants, by the grain in streams out-pouring, under the bright splashing of skies and sails and sailor-boys. Their urges did not match at all.

It was raining, pouring buckets—I am coming to the promised story. Above the ditch creaked the hazel tops. Across the open ground scurried two human shapes. The man had a black beard. The woman's shaggy mane followed free,

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wind-swept. The man was wearing a green caftan and silver ear-rings. In his arms he held an ecstatic child. And it poured and poured, buckets.

II

It turned out that he had long since been granted his commission. Eleven p.m. The last train from the town came rolling into the station. It had just wept and wailed its fill, and now, as the journey rounded off, it grew more cheerful, even burst into laughter. It filled full lungs at last with the whole district, with the leaves, sand and dew pouring into its bursting reservoirs, it halted, clapped its hands and was suddenly silent awaiting a howl of response. From all tracks the echoes should rally. When it heard this, the lady, the sailor and the civilian all in white would turn off the road on to the footpath and straight in front of them, from behind the poplars, out would float the dazzling disc of the dew-lapped roof. They would follow the path, to the hedge, bang the wicket to, and without letting fall a drop from its ridges, cornices, gutters, tickling the ear-rings that danced in her ears, the galvanized planet would begin to roll up to meet them. The rumble of the train rolling away would then suddenly break out again, far away, before crumbling to a rain of tiny, dying soapsuds. Then indeed it would seem not to be a train at all, but water rockets with which the sea was having great fun. Beyond the station wood the moon would climb up on to the road. And then, looking back at the whole scene, you would get the impression that an ever forgetful poet you knew so well had made it all up, and now it would even be a thing for Christmas stockings. You will recall that some time past you saw that same fence in your sleep, and then it was called the edge of the world.

On the moon-bathed porch a bucket of lime-wash showed white. Brush uppermost, a painter's broom lay propped against the wall. Then a window was opened, overlooking the garden. "They've been liming today," came the woman's quiet voice. "Smell it? Let's go and have supper."

And again there was silence. But it did not last long. There was a sudden hubbub in the house.

"What? What do you mean, not there? He's lost?"

It was a bass voice hoarse as a slackened string and a woman's contralto voice glittering with hysteria, crying together.

"Under the tree? Under the tree? Let her get up this instant and tell us what's happened. And do stop that howling! For Christ's sake don't hang on to my arms like that! God Almighty, what on earth is the woman thinking of? Tosha! Tosha darling, Tosha, Tosha! How dare you! How dare you! To my face! You shameless, shameful slattern!"

The words ceased to be words, ran wretchedly together. Broke off. Faded far. Then were no longer to be heard.

The night was ending. But it was still far to dawn. The world was stacked with silence-shattered shapes. Like stooked corn. Resting. As day approached, the distances between the shapes increased, just as if they could thus rest better. They parted, they receded. In the gaps between them inaudibly the chilling meads under their sweat-soaked saddle-cloths puffed and whinnied one to another! Rarely did any shape turn out to be a tree, a cloud or other familiar object. Most were vague, anonymous heaps. They were slightly dizzy, and in that half-fainting state they could scarcely have said whether or not there had just been a shower and it had stopped, or there was about to be one, it would begin to spatter its first drops any moment. Tipping and dipping, they were constantly shuttled from past to future and from future to past. Like sand in quickly turning hour-glasses.

But, a far flight from then, like linen torn by a gust of wind at daybreak and carried who knew whither, on the farther edge of the fields three human shapes now showed, while on the opposite side from them eternally murmured and reverberated the ever-nascent mutter of the distant sea. But these four persons were borne solely from past into future, and never reversed. The human beings in white scurried from place to place, constantly bending down and straightening their backs again, leaping over ditches. Hidden for a moment,

they would reappear at some entirely different point of the field boundary. Though a long way one from another, they kept shouting, waving across one to the other, and as their signs were always misinterpreted, immediately had to start signalling anew, more jerkily and more angrily and often, to show that the messages had not been understood, they changed places. And then, not to go back on their tracks, each went on searching where the other had left off. The united vigour which those figures manifested left the impression of people who the night before had decided to play tennis, but lost their ball and now were fudging all the ditches for it, and when they found it would start all over again.

There was not a breath of wind to stir the shapes which had been resting, yet it was easy to surmise that daybreak was already at hand, and when one looked at those people flitting about over the countryside like spasmodic whirlwinds, one might well have thought that the fields had been lashed and churned up by wind and darkness and fear as some black, broken, three-toothed comb harrowed and harried the world.

There is a law by which nothing can ever happen to ourselves that close at hand is bound to happen to others. Writers have more than once quoted this rule. Its incontrovertibility is to be seen in the fact that while our friends are still getting to know us, we perhaps consider a misfortune is reparable. But by the time we are finally convinced that it is not, our friends have ceased to try to know us, and, as if to confirm the law, we ourselves become different, that is, we ourselves are the ones called upon to burn and to be ruined, brought to court or clapped in the madhouse.

So long as still healthy, these people nagged at the nurse, it surely seemed to them that they would by sheer reason of their anger with the woman afterwards be able just to go into the nursery and there with sighs of relief find their little boy established where he should be in precise ratio to the degree of their alarm and their rage. But when they went, the sight of the empty cot stripped the skin from their voices. But even with soul thus flayed, rushing out, to search, first in the garden, then fanning farther and farther beyond in their quest,

for a considerable time they were still creatures of our own decade. That is to say, they still sought solely that they might find. But gradually, as the hours crept by, as the very night changed face, they too changed. And now, as that night came to its end, they were quite unrecognizable people, no longer understood by what fault of theirs or to what purpose cruel space thus gave them no respite, but continued to drag them and to toss them to all the four quarters of that vast world in which their little child would never more be seen. And had long forgotten the midshipman, who had crossed to search below the cliffs

Is it by reason of this dubious observation that the author has been concealing from his readers what he knows so very well? For does he not know better than anyone else that the moment in the hamlet the bakers' shops took down their shutters and the first trains scattered wide, news of the sad event flashed from villa to villa and at last informed twin Olginaya schoolboys where they might at last deliver their little anonymous friend, trophy of yesterday's triumph.

.

From under the trees and under felt hats low set on foreheads there broke at last the first beginnings of morning still not fully conscious. Day broke in stages, with intervals. Suddenly the murmur of the sea had seemed no more and everything was even stiller than before. Coming from who knew tell where, a sweetish, repetitive effervescence pervaded the tree-tops. One by one, as with sweating silver their lattice lapped the fences, they long sank back to slumber rudely broken. Smooth and detached, two rare diamonds twinkled in the deep nests of that blissful half-light—a bird and its twittering song. Alarmed by its loneliness and abashed by its negligibility, the little songster passionately strove without trace to become merged in that endless ocean of dew incapable of mastering its own thoughts, so distracted and drowsy it was. And succeeded. Its head cocked on one side and its eyes tightly closed, it soundlessly dissolved into the silliness and the sadness of this

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world now newly born, and rejoiced in its own disappearance. But lacked the strength. Then, all at once, breaking through its resistance and revealing its peeping up head with unattainable grace at unattainable height like a planet of ice, its powerful trilling glittered, its springy tattoo far-scattering in needle-fine spokes, so its sprinkling trilling rang clear and froze in amazement as if splashed on a dish with one huge marvelling eye.

But now the world all at once began to grow lighter in a more concerted way. The garden filled to the brim with moist, white light, light which clung most closely to the stuccoed wall, to the gravelled paths and the trunks of those fruit trees which had been smeared with a coppery wash now whitish like lime. It was now, with as death-like an expression on her face, that the mother of the child came dragging her feet in from the fields. Without pause, with stumbling steps, she cut straight across the garden towards the back of the house, indifferent to where she trod or into what her feet might sink. The garden beds tossed her up and let her subside again as if her anxiety were in need of such fresh agitation. And when she had crossed the orchard, she came near that part of the fence from which could be seen the road to the camps. And the midshipman was just making for this point, and proposing to climb over the fence, not to have to go all round the garden. Yawning, the eastern sky bore him up on to the fence like the white sail of a heeled-over yawl. And she awaited him, holding on to the fencing cross-rails. It was clear, she was going to make a pronouncement and her succinct words were prepared.

.

The same proximity of shower just over or about to be was to be felt down on the sea-shore as up on the cliff. Whence could that murmur come, audible all night on the other side of the canvas? The sea now lay cooling, like the silvered back of a mirror, only its shore fringe faintly gasping and whimpering, the horizon now sickly yellow and morose. Forgivable in a dawn pressed to the rear wall of a huge pigsty full-mucked

for hundreds of miles, where at any moment from all sides the frenzied flood might surge. For the moment they crept on their bellies, scarce perceptibly nudging each other, an innumerable herd as it were of slimy black swine. Out on to the cliff—to cliff-top had climbed the midshipman. With gait that was nimble and glad. From stone to stone bounding. For as he had reached the top he had learned a shattering piece of news. From the sands picked a sea-smooth tile and level flicked it out to the water. And as if spittle spattered it skimmed swiftly low away with the same elusive young sound that all shallow waters reveal. In the very last instant, when, utterly frantic by failure, he had turned to go back to the villa. And, as he had drawn near from the side of the common, Lelia had rushed up to the fence from inside, was there to await till he came, and then in quick rush of syllables gasped. "We're—all in. . . . Save us. . . . You must find him . . . He's . . . He's your son!"

Whereupon he seized her hand, and she tore herself away and escaped. And when he climbed over into the garden, she was now nowhere to be found. Again he picked up a stone. And so, picking and throwing without cease, set out from the house again, to vanish beyond the cliff edge. While behind him his tracks lived on, never still. He, too, was dead tired. It was the shingle, slipping and slithering, that sighed and uneasily turned as he noisily edged himself in and got comfortable, to sleep his ease at last, in utter peace.

III

More than fifteen years had passed. Outside, the light was failing, indoors it was dark. A woman whom nobody knew was enquiring for the third time for a member of the *Presidium* of the *Provincial Executive Committee*, a former naval officer named Polivanov. Facing her, a soldier, fed-up. Through the hall window could be seen the yard: piles of bricks, snow-covered. At the back of the yard, where once had been a rubbish pit, now a long-neglected mountain of refuse, the sky

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was a dreamy forestry commission plantation growing up the slopes of that accumulation of dead cats and empty food-tins resurrecting now in the thaw and clearing their throats and beginning to pant with former Springs and drip-dripping, sparrow rumour and chatter of plenty. Yet one only needed to take one's eyes from that backyard corner and peer up above to be amazed how utterly new the sky was.

The ability it now possessed all the clock round to sweep far to all sides from sea and from railroad head the thunder and mutter of rifles and guns, had thrust deep back its remembrance of 1905. Quite as if from end to end whirled away by the highroad roller in its heady cannonade and now finally slaughtered and by this in-trodden, it frowned, speechless, and without any movement led off from the scene as indeed in Winter is the nature of any ribbon of the monotonously unwinding trail of the rails.

What on earth had come over the sky? Even by day it suggested the image of night that we see in our youth and when marching far. Even after midday it was striking, infinitely outstanding, even after midday took its fill of the ravaged earth, overthrowing the sleepy and raising up dreamers.

These were the aerial routes by which daily, like trains, the through thoughts of Liebknecht, Lenin and a handful of minds of their flight of thought left the station. Those were the routes established on a level adequate for the passage of any frontiers, whatever their name. One of the lines, laid away back during the war, had maintained all the one-time strategical importance imposed on the engineers by the nature of the front above which they had had to construct it. This old military line, somewhere, at places of its own choosing and at hours of its own selection, cutting through the frontiers of Poland and then of Germany, here, at its very beginning, before everybody's eyes, burst from the limits of understanding of indirectness and its patience. It passed over the yard of this house, and the yard was fearsome of the far-offness of the ultimate destination and the oppressive clumsiness of the route, as a fugitive suburb is ever afraid of the railway line that misses it far.

The soldier's reply to the lady was that Polivanov had not yet returned. Three species of fed-upness rang in his voice. There was the fed-upness of a creature accustomed to liquid mud suddenly finding itself in dry dust. There was the fed-upness of a man routined in sequestering and requisitioning detachments in which it had been he who put the questions and a dame like this made the answers, therefore fed-up that the proper order of model duologue should thus be broken and topsy-turveyed. Finally there was the imaginary fed-upness with which any intrusion of the most everyday substance endows anything utterly unheard-of. And, being perfectly well aware how utterly unheard-of the set-up of recent times must seem to this lady, the soldier became deliberately obstructive, as if utterly unaware what her feelings might be, and never in his whole life had he breathed aught but the good atmosphere of dictatorship. All at once, in came darling Lyov. Say: a shoulder strap of behemothean footsteps at one fell swoop swept him with cold fresh breath of snow, and silence unhallowed, straight in from mid-air to the second floor. Snatching at the object, which transpired to be a brief-case, the soldier halted the incomer much as one might a fair in full swing.

"Just think"—he addressed him—"somebody's been round from *Prisoners and Booty HQ*."

"About those Hungarians again?"

"Of course."

"But they've had their answer flat. No papers, no departure!"

"And what did I say? It's very clear to me it's because of the ships. And that's how I put it to them."

"And what did they say then?"

"They knew all that without us. It's up to you to see the papers are in order. As if as crew. Once there, so to speak, all's in order. Make room for others."

"Right. And what else?"

"Nothing more. All they're worried about is the permit. The order, they say."

"But of course not," Polivanov interrupted. "Why go on repeating? I wasn't talking about that!"

"There's a despatch in from Kanatnaya," the soldier went on, mentioning the street where the Extraordinary Commission had its HQ. Then, drawing closer, he lowered his voice to a whisper, as if giving secret instructions.

"You don't mean it? So that's how it stands, is it? Impossible!" Polivanov objected, but distracted and rather unconcerned.

The soldier fell back. For a moment the two men stood, without a word being spoken.

"Brought the bread?" the soldier then asked, all at once, and morosely, for the bulging brief-case might well have served an answer. 'Oh yes, there is something else. A citizeness to see you.'

"Right. Right. Right," drawled Polivanov, still very distracted.

The hawser of giant footsteps drew tight, quivering. The portfolio came to life.

"In my office, Comrade," he said coldly to the lady in question.

He had not recognized her.

In comparison with the vestibule, the office was pitch dark. She followed him in. Once across the threshold, she halted. No doubt the room was carpeted, for he had not taken two or at most three paces when he seemed to vanish. Then similar footsteps sounded at the far end of that murk. There came sounds as of systematic clearing of the top of a desk, glasses being moved, crumbs, lumps of sugar, parts of a stripped down revolver, hexagonal pencils.

Carefully he drew his hand across the desk, tipping something over, wiping something as he fumbled for matches. Imagination had only just transported that room with its pictures on the bookshelf-lined walls, its palms and its bronzes, to a boulevard of onetime Petersburg and a standard lamp with a whole handful of lights in an outstretched hand to take them riding down the whole boulevard, when suddenly the telephone rang. That jingling bell with field post or hamlet at the other end was an instant reminder of the wire feeling its way out from this place through a town engulfed in utter

darkness and of the fact that the action was taking place out in the country, under the bolsheviks.

"Yes," replied the dissatisfied, impatient and dead-tired man, and no doubt shielded his eyes with his hand. "Yes. I am aware of it. I am aware of it. Nonsense Check all along the line. Nonsense I have been in touch with HQ. I've been able to get Zhmerinka for the past hour. And is that all? Yes, I will, I'll let you know. Why, of course not, in about twenty minutes! That all?"

"Well, Comrade, and what can I do for you?"—in one hand a matchbox, in the other a bluish spot of sputtering sulphurous flame, he addressed his visitor. And then, almost simultaneously with the sound of falling, scattering matches, rang out her glittering, shattering whisper.

"Lehal!" beside himself, cried Polivanov. "Impossible! Forgive me! Can it be? You, Lelia!"

"Yes . . . yes . . . how . . . ah! let me get my breath. . . . Thank God! I've found you!" she whispered, panting and crying at once.

Suddenly it all vanished. In the gleam of a lighted oil-glimmer, a man in a short unbuttoned tunic, corroded by acute lack of sleep, and a woman straight from the station, filthy. Long unwashed. Facing one another. In the glow of that oil-glimmer her coming, the death of Dmitri and of her little daughter, of the very existence of whom he had known nothing, and in short all she had managed to tell him before the lamp was alight, seemed depressingly just in its comprehensiveness, an open invitation to him who listened to plunge into his own grave too, in so far as his sympathy were not mere empty words. Then, with vision of her in that oil-glimmer, to his mind at once came all that past story by reason of which, meeting now, they had not fallen on each other's necks and kissed. And he could not but smile faintly as he marvelled at the vigour of such prejudices. In the light of the oil-glimmer all her hopes of the style of this office vanished.

For this man now seemed so alien to her that it was quite impossible to write off the feeling as a change. The more determinedly therefore did she proceed to her business, once again, as on that former occasion, hastening to say her say blindly, parrot-fashion, as if on an errand for another.

"If you care for our child. . . ."

That was her opening.

"Again?" Polirvanov blazed out at once and began to talk and talk and talk, at top speed, never-halting. As if writing an article. With elaborate relative clauses. Stuffed with commas. Paced about the office, halting here, halting there, with wide gestures of helpless indignation, frenzied gestures of exasperation. And when he did interrupt himself it was only to frown and pluck at the skin over the bridge of his nose with thumb and two fingers, fretting and massaging that spot as the source of this indignation now beginning to gutter and dry up.

He implored her to stop thinking that other people were subject to her whims and she could twist everybody round her little finger. By all that was sacred he entreated her once and for all to abandon such fancy notions, particularly seeing how on that other occasion she had in the end had to confess how wrong she had been. He told her that even if he accepted the ridiculous suggestion she had mooted, she would thereby merely achieve the very opposite of what she wanted. It was impossible to convince anyone that something which was not a minute ago, then was suddenly there, was no find, but a loss. He called to mind the high degree of irresponsibility and liberty he had felt the moment he accepted her fairy story and how that very instant he lost any desire to go on fudging about in ditches and dykes, all he wanted to do was have a good bath.

"So that even supposing time to go into reverse," he said, in a would-be essay of bitter sarcasm, and once again he was to start searching for a member of her family, his only concern would be for her personally or for y or for z, nohow for himself or her ludicrous ideas. . . .

"Have you finished?" she demanded, having given him a

chance to blow off some steam. "You are right, I had forgotten what I said myself. Do you really not remember? Maybe it was mean and despicable. I was out of my mind from joy that the boy had been found. And so remarkably. Our boy. Oh, Lyov darling—to think, if you only knew what danger he is in now! I don't know where to begin. Let's start from the beginning. We have not seen each other since that day. You don't know him. He is so trusting. That will one day be his ruin. There is a scoundrel, an adventurer—though I know we should not judge our fellow-men—Neploshaev's his name . . . he and Tosha were in the *Corps des Pages* together. . . ."

At these words Polivanov, still pacing the office, was rooted to the spot. He had ceased to listen at all. For, in the midst of all her other flow of words, she had now uttered the very surname which only a moment ago the soldier had whispered to him. Polivanov was well acquainted with the case. It was hopeless for the accused. And there was only an hour to go.

"So he was acting under a pseudonym, was he?"

The colour left her cheeks when she heard that question. It meant that he knew more than she did, and the matter was more serious even than she had described. She now completely forgot in whose HQ she was, and, imagining that the real crime had been the use of a false name, began a hasty defence of her son from precisely the wrong angle.

"But, Lyov dear, he couldn't possibly have made a stand openly. Now, could he?"

Again when he grasped that her child might be concealed behind any one of the names familiar to him from official papers, he had ceased to hear her. And, standing at his desk, he rang up another office and made certain enquiries, moving now from one conversation to another, ever deeper and more darkly into the town and into the night, till before him lay unravelled the utter ruin contained in the last and definitely reliable information.

He turned his head. Lelia had gone. He was aware of a frightful aching in his eye-sockets and as his glance swept the room it swam before his vision, a confusion of stalactites and rivulets. He made to pucker the skin on the bridge of his nose,

AERIAL ROUTES

but instead he rubbed his eyes, and when he did so the stalactites danced and became misty. It would not have troubled him so much, had those spasms not been so frequent and so inaudible. Then he discovered her. Like an enormous, unbroken doll she lay between the block of his desk and the chair, on that same layer of shavings and rubbish which in the darkness, while still conscious, she had taken to be a rug.

1905

FOREWORD

The tattered heavens dangle close
like a curtain worn and old,
into our ramshackle prose
with October comes the cold.

So soft at first, the snow, so fresh,
as eery still as airy news—
Oh, Revolution, 'tis your very self
in unearthly novelties!

A convict lassie in the van,
maid of Siberian Orleans
who, never clear how fast you run,
leap blindly at eluding scenes.

In gloomiest night, a socialist,
from random flint you strike a light,
at once your features of a sphinx
our glowing dawn and freezing night.

But, springing to life in distant sky
the battle guns distract your ear!
As if our world were but your toy
you passions passionately stir.

Amid the festive flags then make
gestures evasive, gestures proud;
an artist with your name at stake,
shrink from the triumphs of the crowd;

a poet, with the first fire dead,
seeking his soul in change of scene!
Not only money-bags are fled
also the mean ones come between.

1. FATHERS

Think—in our time!
and turned to a lecturer's catchword,
and the fettering years since then
have made
such a clatter
the whole damn thing
is forgotten,
and all that occurred
is no legend inspiring, but
a frigid
'historical'
matter.

It's all night—armed night—
and we the dawn,
waiting
to go over the top.
Premature?
But look at the past!
Thrumming heart makes the mind nimbler.
Integrate that marvel,
you sullen
dull
school,
with puerile parrots as masters.

Preceded?
By twilight.
With ruin
and jabber
and heroes—
daguerreotype—or assassin—
with calcined cinders for soul
and a nitro-glycerine halo!

Noon
in elegant throes
hid behind factory chimneys,
using the fog
as her pall.

Tattooing drums
and the scandalous clatter
of tumbrils
of out-of-date type,
hushed by the thunder
of storming engines—
hulking imperial serfdom,
lumbering
blinking
to daylight.
Called 'Russia
after the Reform'.

The Perovsky girl,
the Populist Freedom Party,
the glorious First of March—
nihilists smug in their smocks,
students pedantic in specs . . .
and so on.
Why, our fathers'
parting
story
seems just like a fable of Jason—
with his Argonaut
still on the stocks.

That's the best you can get—
you can't possibly see it clearer if
after quarter of a century
you fumble about
underground
for the treasure that's there,

straining too
 eyes made bleary
 by the light
 and the libel
 and lies
 with which
 externals confound.

Dostoevski too.
 Those Siberian prisoners.
 Who guessed, indeed,
 every search was a museum exhibit
 for us—
 or
 those that went
 for a last saunter
 dressed only in shirt and cold noose—
 how well
 they're preserved
 by the gibbet!

And that
 was yesterday.
 Were we thirty years earlier,
 ranting in
 from the bright show
 outside,
 into that ill-lit other world—
 who are those tireless rubber-gloved women,
 decanting those dangerous
 deadly distillates
 but our own
 marvellous
 mothers?

Turned to a drizzle.
 The hullabaloo at the Court
 has subsided.

BORIS PASTERNAK

Lamps out in the stuffy night.
What does it breathe?
Dead leaves.
Hear?
The short
dry
churchyard grass.
See?
There's never a soul in sight.

That's where we are,
serenaded
by the worthily worded
reports of Commissions—
as if they slake
the September night
in pregnant ignorance burning!
And tomorrow's bouquet
of bombs
kept Steve Halturin
awake . . .

But yet this night
was to know
no glimmer of dawn.
till Port Arthur—
with the telegraph poles
the new pride
of the gibbet—
and cables: to kill—
rich spawn
on an overgrown dyke
swarming
till a winter
that is to decide.

Take it
like this:

the late afternoon sky
 with a band of fire branding it
 brings us to the window.
 Why, by that glow round the chimneys
 we instinctively know
 what's at hand,
 as if
 we remembered ourselves
 that hundred
 Decembers
 ago.

This! Laocoön
 in the form of the smoke
 braving
 the bitter cold air
 lissomly strips
 to half-nelson
 the lumbering clouds.
 Day
 broken
 shrinks round the gleaming cables
 then shamefully
 slithers
 away;

when
 to protect him
 the street lamps pick out each pitfall
 as if in sheer pity pointing
 the craven
 his way;
 while those other lamps
 through night mist crawling
 in heavenly cohorts
 haunt
 and harry
 that horrible day.

2. . . . AND CHILDREN

Only fourteen
at the time.
The 'workers' school'
for adults
was a hothouse
for half-hardy art;
that is why
(since my Dad was a painter)
I lived
mid the paints
and the stools
and the plaster Dianas
and canvas
in a crazy
annexe
of the sky.

And I see
the confusion
of winter
with the fear
of the cold
in command.
Port Arthur
has gone, but:
'Oh, we'll soon send 'em more men!'
And dusk
keeping its eye
on the old city.
And paints, professors and canvas
and palettes
and bedlam.

What an assortment of colours!
From the lunatic to the crank
the boob

and the bubble,
 the brain
 the blockhead
 the boor;
 the classrooms
 packed to a button
 the breathing
 musty and dank.
 The seedlings'
 tender emotions
 voiced
 by the iron
 of their boots
 on the floor.

Or a moment like this:
 on the lagoon of my room
 the prosaic doorbell
 braving
 and breasting
 the breakers.
 Is it he?
 It is he, Scriabin,
 coming!
 Oh, booming of blood in my temples!
 Where on earth can I fly from this miracle
 now
 my
 maker?

What a Catherine-wheel
 of a year!
 The instrument's ready
 bearing
 before
 you
 its glittering
 sinews of steel—

BORIS PASTERNAK

why wait?
Then compose!
The slippery days.
Cry, then; 'Steady,
steady'
I'm all give . . .
you swindler!
where is my share
of the deal?

A Petersburg night.
A moon
like a crisp
new crown
and a glassy clink
as the strange crowd
tramples the air,
when dudes and scavengers
meet
in the Tsar's own town
to hear
Father Gapon
lay the national
misery
bare.

There's a roar
in the hall
a forest
of swaying heads,
five thousand fighting for breath.
The wind
in its rage
whines
at the door of this crèche:
five thousand beds

puckered and raw
 but
 undisguised
 lusty
 new age

A notorious trollop
 of dawn
 bruised berries—
 the clouds;
 a vapour of sewerage
 muffling the murmuring feet
 as they crowd
 with their makeshift
 banners
 (or fancies
 or shrouds)
 from the hall
 to the blistering fires
 of the frostbrittle street.

A marvellous river of people.
 Muttering thunder.
 Hats off, men and pray—
 for your leader
 the priest
 is astute.
 To the left is the palace
 to the right is God's acre
 but under your noses
 awaiting you,
 His Majesty's Royal Salute!

Windows are in leaf
 lamp-standards
 budded with faces
 admiring those endless
 cohorts of the marchers

BORIS PASTERNAK

break through the blocks at the crossroads
sweep easy
by open spaces
swell
by the bridge at the Palace
to a beautiful lake.

Then—
nine
harsh
volleys
shatter
that mirror of waters
the last sound
dawdling
in echoes as
bedraggled as
glory,
and the sea of heads froths to a panic
and the wail of the slaughter
fills the far skies
with its eddies
persistent
and gory.

The sidewalks
in flight,
the brief day
shattered for ever. . . .
To imperial gunners
from barricades
the response.
And I?
was rising fifteen
so how not but remember?
Such days were a diary—
open anywhere!
by chance!

Consider!
 Compressed
 from frail units
 snow flakes
 fluttering earthward
 like attitudes
 fitting this time,
 with its jelly of empires.
 But 'twas manna-like snow
 that muttering quad
 of a fine grammar school
 shone in that winter rime,

the upper school
 starred with heroes
 starred with those
 already in the Party.
 Juniors?
 jeer tsardom
 unchecked
 pile desks
 playing parliament
 never still
 in the throes of wholesale fancies
 of evolution
 and self-respect.

And days like this:
 twenty-four hours of snow
 up to night that is still
 waiting
 for the morning
 to be torn
 by the Kremlin volleys
 to death.
 How could I not know
 and detest,
 being forged

in the criminal workshop
to which I was born?

3. PEASANTS AND FACTORY WORKERS

Blizzard in March.
Blotted out map-makers' markings.
Older the winter
dourer the silence
as though rebels
and ruler
or steppe
and Petersburg darkness
were not
any more cruel rarity
than Christmas
pretty
with snow.

But that's
no consolation!
However romantic we think it
thousand-mile-wide
bitter penury
like the mush of foul beer
stifling the air
with the stink
of its stale
stilted
ferments—
for at forty
of frost
there's no dainty gushing.

So
before we know where we are
there's the fine folk
made nimble by flames

with a hoary horde yelling orders
 to the crazy horizon,
 hoarse voices
 commanding
 the broken countryside
 with the hot slogan:
 'down with the bloodsucking landlords!'

Attired
 in terror
 thrust out
 by the vengeance of night
 they flee
 flee in sleighs
 through wild-wind forests
 thirsting for mercy
 from the flame-light
 from the mock
 of the spying moonlight
 from the smouldering folly
 behind them
 whence the burning whips
 are bursting.

Crouched to the seats
 like cowards
 they drive
 like brainless hell-imps
 till they sight the haven
 of the country-town
 with the good-fellow
 chief of police
 and the treasure of trains
 but then rumour
 of general strike
 to cool
 their new cockiness
 down.

Summer.
 May
 or else June.
 That railway Vesuvius
 Łódź—
 listen!
 they are riveting
 the armour plates of the sky!
 See
 the redhot jaws
 of the junction
 hear
 that odd
 sobbing
 trickle
 as the glass
 and the splintering bullets
 kiss
 and sigh.

The usual
 humbug.
 Troops
 patrolling.
 And workers.
 And a clash.
 Yet that's
 a trifle
 that's
 all in the game
 perfectly open
 and fair.
 But
 routing the dead workers' funeral
 that was the powder the flame
 would fire
 any dynamite
 in this sullen

sultry
air.

That was when the fun got going
with the houses
battened down
as if schooners at the Horn
Marble
because it is blind
has honour
and pride
so the sightless façades showed the town
stripped
of all shame
an outspoken
clean monument
to labouring mankind.

At midday
all the offices
closed
with a curfew
ordered at five.
Like a flaming
naphtha-river
was the setting sun
while the raging workers
made the junction serpents writhe
and about the busy town
barricades were spun.

But
that night
the army cordon
squeezed them
from their web,
and alleys hoarded echoes
from the bullet-blighted

streets.
The gunners were excellent.
A lovely bag.
But
each pleb
shot down in cold blood
for his pluck
was a ruling-class
defeat.

4. NAVAL REBELLION

Palls.
In time.
Everything.
Only you
have no chance
washed
in the welter of days
and of years
and of ages
in the white rage of the waves
in the white trance of acacias
Perhaps it is you
sea
make such wilderness sages?

Throned
on a mountain of nets
beatifically smiling
yet frisky as spring.
Idle breeze.
That fugitive lock
waving from brow
or from prow.
Or for paddling babes' beguiling—
till
the trumpet

of tyrant
tempest
and the frothy
toss-up
for dock

Then
all picture-postcard illusions
are disintegrated
under a sky
of livid
suspicion
and hate
as the sea
like a primeval monster
gets hoarse in its maniac hatred
and with ravenous breakers
crumbles the stones
of the quay.

And sails
that were bunt
are huddled
on shivering bones
and the summer of colour's
a simmering cauldron
of sullied water
o'er the welter of which
crouch the dark heavens
groaning
and finger the fringe
of the flinching world
with clamorous gulls.

There they come
clumsily labouring
through the mill
of infernal chaos of cloud

BORIS PASTERNAK

and gasp into port—
the heavens
bellied and bursting
shatter and spill
serpents of flame
west
south
east
and north.

.
What an idyllic scene!
with the evening crabs
slowly stirring from shelter
and trees of the bay
drawn in by the sun
to its
funeral
whirlpool
of ripples
murmuring love
and dappling
with rusty rash
the flushed hulk
and the guns.

H.M.S. *Patyomkin*
at the ebb of a tropic stew
aglow.
The ambience?
A myriad galley flies
in perpetual chorus.
And as audience?
The crew!
But why?
Oh, nothing . . .
a bagatelle . . .
only the lower-deck butchery—

high
 But
 in the silence
 the slim land breeze
 scudded
 cooling
 to good ship
Patyomkin
 and
 ranked in glittering pride
 her portholes pitted the darkness
 and sleeplessly brooded
 till
 at glimmer of daylight
 they faltered
 and shuddered
 and died.

Thick-knotted
 the caressing fingers of the morning swell
 were mercury razors
 sliding clean
 from the shining hulk.
 To swab at the decks
 or pray
 to the bid of a bell
 the dreadnought crew wakened
 proceeded
 from night
 to daytime
 sulk.

Nor would look at their skilly
 but gulped
 dry bread
 nor sit down
 but shuffled in groups
 till

BORIS PASTERNAK

one in immaculate white
ALL HANDS
(bellows)
ON DECK
purple
under his brown skin
drills
seven hundred
perfectly sure
he is right—

Dissatisfied? What?
To your places!
But
not a man stirred
till
password or haphazard impulse
flung them
in desperate sally
to capture
the stronghold of the guns
nor even heard
some of them
this railing
of the raging
'Lord God of the Galley '

'Don't be silly buggurs'
he yelled
and some of them did pause
in the hail of his fire
with a servile flutter of gladness
while the other poor blighters
took their angry stand
in the maws
of the guntowers
and awaited
the hideous price

to be paid
for their madness.

There were fluttering hearts
and hard faces
till
howl
or a whine
broke from one
in his agony:
'Lads,
what's the odds?
what's their game?
who'd stand it?
let's be our own masters!
let's better the swine!'
and out from the turret
leapt the men
like avenging
venturesome
flames.

Then
crackling and spurting
spread the fire
from the deck
to the bridge
and netted the dreadnought
with rockets
outshining the sun
and knotted
the torn air
with the racket:
'You bloody midge!'
and
t-t-tap tap tap
as they spotted
and potted them off
on the run.

T-t-tap
 as the bullets
 spattered
 spick-and-span steel
 or filiped the foam
 as they followed
 their prey
 to the waves.
 Where . . ?
 Still aboard!
 So they found
 the flaw
 in *his* heel
 and flung
 his cadaver o'er board
 to inspect
 the Port Arthur graves.

But down
 by the turbulent
 turbines
 none could believe it
 till
 like a stalker
 Matoushénko
 peered into that pit
 picked out the lay of the land
 and then
 beckoned to Steve
 calling
 'Steve, okay, Steve,
 we've bloody well done it!'

Steve clambered up to him
 embraced him
 laughing
 declaring: 'We'll do
 without nannies.'

Sh!
 Under guard
 and the rest
 larded with lead
 or in pickle.
 'But
 we must be wary
 what about your engineers?
 only one?
 send him up—
 dressed!'

But that day must come
 to a close
 so see them at dusk:
 smoke
 curtains the vessel
 makes modest the rating
 who booms—rating
 as captain
 to ratings—
 'Stand by!'
 hides the bustle
 as they ominously
 turn
 to Odessa
 forging
 a furrow
 of doom.

5. STUDENTS

Baumann too!
 That's a name
 to the spine
 like the floes of the sky!
 Windows

'balconies
 roofs
 creep
 to the sobbing of drums
 drawn in the spate of bare heads
 in the throes of the masterful
 funeral
 fanfare
 for that massacred
 student
 throbbing.

And then
 from a tenement crag
 another trumpet
 rejoicing:
 'You fell
 in the struggle
 of mankind'
 that
 a young girl
 o'er the valley of echoes
 propelling
 her sally of praise
 for hushed voices
 emboldened to urge
 on the dirge of the bells
 to a fiery rally.

Till at last
 the chill wind
 whisked
 the last vestige of chant
 from the haze
 and the silence
 bared
 the tatter-class torso
 of the mute town walls

pinioned
 by the impertinent
 flaunting militia
 offering the students
 the immaculate menace
 of—force

Thus the first
 instalment
 consent
 to the call
 of a debt
 the funeral
 made
 so the cemetery rooks
 need make no more sound
 the cobble dust
 may repose
 the sentinel heavens
 set their stars
 the moon
 hide its silver face
 in that flowering mound

That
 was sweet
 night.
 Now we come
 to a sweaty hustle
 to a whirlwind
 dandling a cossack
 under the arc lamps' glare
 Look at him
 grown in the sin
 of that limited busby
 poor fool
 in the varsity quad
 whip to a lunatic fair.

And the bare stones
 surge
 round the walls
 casting hot eyes of defiance
 the orphaned lamps
 bleeding
 their sleepless light
 Though
 venture but forward
 and the night answers
 with the prize of bullets
 Shrieks
 of ambush
 and 'Swine!'
 Confusion
 and flight.

Locked.
 Locked.
 Break!
 And broken.
 The doors that were locked
 like a frail film of ice
 on the deep
 of the main corridor.
 Make way, please!
 Corners
 closets
 coals
 the caretakers' stock
 of buckets and brooms.
 'Steady, there!'
 No pulse.
 He . . .
 is it hopeless? . . .
 No more—

and the night wind

1905

through the doorway
in past the muddy air
eddyng round the fallen benches.
Fingers in blood
arms bare
the stethoscope breathing . . .
'Well'
But a numbing
shake of the head.

But there's this
in the quad:
Lomonossov dim in the shade
soldiers ready to 'at 'em'
a curious mud
of corroding red blotches
and a rich background of parade—
a mixed group
snapped by the snow
developed
by immortal blood.

6. MOSCOW IN DECEMBER 1905

A city dreams.
Of its whole daring doing
(not its dirty spies)
a kind of glow
from afar
veiled by gold rain
in a shower from Presnia side.
Oh
a bountiful rain
a beautiful prize
for a painter
were such a one ripe
for the city
and with the right power.

BORIS PASTERNAK

But the sun
ever-setting sun
all day by day
icily vacant
cons
with its prismatic glasses
and
waist high only
rakes in its vision
like the waste array of the barricades
spanning
and blocking
all
the important
passes.

Nor is there
even more perception
in the parading nation
than in the pert
parody
of meticulous tarts.
Merely
a ludicrous power
for the pious
consternation
the posture of brains
aerated
with the bubbles of garrulous hearts.

A meeting at the Aquarium.
Oh, but let the
highbrows
haggle
and we—
watch this young lad
in the vestibule
smoking cigars—
he has a bomb

on a fuse
 in his pocket
 boneless legs that are sagging
 tinderwood tightening his mouth
 and a sensation
 of playing a farce.

But
 through the fog
 of his fug
 through the swingdoor glass
 he glimpses
 how the hurricane
 masters the pavements
 blasting the bare
 boughs of the forest
 of crowd
 like red
 orchard leaves
 whisking
 the flimsily fleet echo
 of the canter
 of cavalry
 that riddles
 the canyon
 of houses.

What a cigar—
 this eleventh!
 What hour
 gesture
 and exit!
 —For a breath of fresh air.
 What a smoker
 young
 foolish
 and pale
 tossing
 scornful fag-end

away
 Refreshing
 with inexorable thunder!
 And the wild horses
 rock-maddened,
 pell-mell
 scattered
 to hell.

Or this family gem:
 as frame
 a ring of wet swords
 poor kerchiefs
 rich whiskers
 a medley of leering dull features
 a folly of fires
 And the guns' gruff coughing
 accords another scrap—
 ten score
 to the wall
 against a horde of hell's creatures.

Then
 for days
 what city—
 of winter's
 immaculate
 wastes
 without police
 or even puppy
 to people
 to trample
 to spoil them.
 'Tis like a hospital whiteness.
 Even these rheumatic streets
 have barricade bullets
 to strip
 and massage

and urge
and uncoil them.

Look at those overturned
tramcars
that's slick re-converting
when the stink of the horses
has scarcely had time
to retire
after fine litigation
with distance, too,
to be spurning
any wig-ridden sanction
turned to ramparts
against rifle fire.

Ten days'
tenacious bombardment
oh, quite enough
to get perfectly used to the racket
to be startled and jarred
by the treacherous lull
on that Thursday—
out of doors
looking up
asking the sky
angling for dirty rumours
from flirtatious stars.

And that's all the answer.
That.
And the still tram cables.
Talk of surrender.
No wonder.
The middle-classes
not in it.
Troop trains and guns
gut the dawn.
How are they able to believe

in the fable of freedom
 or
 what's more
 want to win it

What, done, then?
 After the curses
 and crises
 and then crowning glory
 the conquest of Moscow
 but a barricade away?
 Pride, say,
 of the night patrol—
 sixes
 reds
 with no sound
 but crackling footsteps
 whispering cold
 heart's bonny play.

No.
 Well,
 gnrt your teeth!
 The shadows are drawing in
 the siege spanning you in
 with new
 cannonade.
 And the fort
 of old mews and warehouses
 burning leaves
 tossing beams
 like torn twigs.
 Thus rooks' nests
 are made.

Hell's fools.
 Keep your wits!
 Use them!
 The public baths—

oh, do think of a hole
 so try to find sand
 for your ostrich
 inventions.
 For a glance now
 on Moscow
 shows those recent
 miracles
 shrinking.
 Nice people
 fly shrieking
 at thought
 of those swineherd intentions.

Mien and Riemann
 lighted
 by the glower of débâcle
 with numb razors
 scrape beards
 from blunt faces.
 What a hope!
 when the whole town's
 blazed in flames
 licking
 and crackling
 and lewdly crying
 Mien and Riemann's reward
 as a rope!

And getting back
 underground.
 It's late
 for anything else
 with the workers muttering
 and
 on torn poles
 white flags
 a-flutter

and the rattle of cossack hoofs
and the snorts of wild swine
eager for hell
as they flay them
and slay them
to make garbage
at last
for the gutter.

Hades behind.
Because silent
more horrid Hades.
Only the hiss
of patriot wind
to harrow your ear.
Then
out of that blizzard
brave cossacks
with blatant blades
searching
seeking
arresting
lavish of hatred
and fear.

And the dawn.
A white morning
open to the flight of heroes
from the ruin
of this bridal bed.
And the women
groaning
in the débris
would witness their triumphant throes
by the show
of each sheet
stained
by a confident
Browning.

Safe Conduct

Safe Conduct

To the memory of Rainer Maria Rilke

PART ONE

I

ONE hot summer morning in 1900 a fast train pulled out from the Kursk Station. Just before it started a man in a black Tyrolean cloak came up to the window, with him a tall woman, who might have been his mother, or an elder sister. They and my father began all three equally excitedly discussing something evidently they alone knew all about. The woman exchanged broken phrases with my mother in Russian, but the stranger on the other hand spoke only German. Though I knew that language perfectly well, I had never before heard it spoken like that. For this reason there on the busy platform, waiting for the final starting bell, that foreigner remained a mere silhouette among ordinary bodies, an invention in a crowd which was certainly no invention.

On the journey, nearer to Tula, the same couple reappeared, this time in our compartment. They said that our express was not scheduled to stop at Kozlovsk-Zaseka at all, and they were not at all confident that the chief conductor would tell the driver in time that he was to halt at the Tolstoys. From the ensuing conversation I came to the conclusion that they intended to visit Countess Tolstoy, since she often went to Moscow to symphony concerts, and had not so long before visited us, but that infinitely important entity which was symbolized by the initials Baron L.N. [Baron Lev Nikolaievich Tolstoy] and played a role in our household which was mysterious but had had many a pipe smoked over it was completely

resistant to materialization I had indeed seen it in early childhood, but the famous grey beard, subsequently freshened in my mind by drawings of it made by my father, by Repin and by others, had by my child imagination long since been ascribed to another ancient whom I had seen more often and, most likely, more recently—Nikolai Nikolayevich Gay.

Later, in my vision, the strangers took their leave and went back to their own coach. Shortly after that the brakes suddenly clutched at the slopes of a cutting which flew by, birches flashed past us and, cascading the whole length of the track, the couplings hissed and crashed. Then, with relief, out from a whirlwind of singing sand a humpy sky tore free and up into the heavens and an empty buggy fluttered airily to the feet of the passengers who had alighted. All the momentary excitement, like a gunshot, was absorbed into the silence of that halt, so utterly indifferent to us. Not for us it existed. Farewell handkerchiefs waved to us and we waved back. I still had just time to see the driver help them in. Having handed the lady a rug, he half rose in his seat, a red-sleeved figure, to tuck his belt straight and gather the long skirts of his peasant coat under him. In a moment they would be off. But the curve was already taking us in hand, and slowly, like a finished page, that auxiliary station turned over and was lost to sight. Person and incident were passed to oblivion, and, as one might imagine, for all time.

II

Three years had passed. It was winter outside. The street was reduced to a third by dusk and fur coats. Silently moved the alembics of carriages and lanterns. To the normal sequence of seamliness, which even before had more than once known interruption, this was the end. For ever washed away by a more powerful law of transmission—the graphic.

I have no intention of describing in detail what went before this. How, by a sensing of things reminiscent of Gumilyov's *Sixth Sense*, nature became revealed to the ten-year-old, his

first passion, as response to the pentapetalous persistence of growth, taking the form of botany, as the names tracked down by the determinant assuaged the sweet-scented pupils so credulously craving light from Linnaeus, fame after nonentity.

How in the spring of 1901 a company of Amazons from Dahomey were exhibited at the Zoo. How my first physical sense of woman became bound up with the physical sense of ranks of nakedness sealed in by suffering and a tropical drum parade. How, earlier than I should have been, I became a prisoner of plastic form, having too early beheld the uniform of enslavement in those Amazons.

How at Obolensk in 1903, with the Scriabins as neighbours, a ward of some acquaintances living on the other side of the river Protva fell into it. How a student lost his life by jumping in to save her, and how later, after having tried to commit suicide a number of times over the same cliff, she went out of her mind. How later, when I broke a leg, in one evening evading two wars, and lay pinned to my bed in plaster, the house of those acquaintances across the river caught fire, and how ridiculously the feeble village fire-bell shook and strained itself. How the acute-angled glow forked and reached up like a freed viper, then suddenly, tipping its cover over in a column of shavings, went tumbling down into meat-pasty flakes of raspberry-greyish smoke.

How, riding post-haste home from Maloyaroslavetz with the doctor, my father went grey when, two versts away, he suddenly caught sight of that billowing glare rising in a cloud and giving him the idea that the woman he loved, and with her his two children and a three hundredweight mass of plaster which nobody could have moved for fear of ruining it for ever, were all in flames.

All this I am not going to describe. The reader will do it for me, loving such fairy-tales and alarms and looking upon history as a story which is always continued in the next instalment. Whether he would like it to have a sensible end is not clear, but what he does love are those places beyond which his own excursions have never extended. He gets completely bogged down in forewords and introductions, whereas for me

life only begins to take form where he tends to sum things up. Without going into the circumstance that my understanding has been endowed with an intrinsic logic of history in the irrefutable shape of the inevitability of death, in my own being too I have only really come to life in those memorable moments when the wearisome illusion of the parts came to a temporary end and, digesting it all before it set forth on its further travels, a full-fledged sensation rose firm before me.

So, as I was saying, it was very cold outside and the street was reduced to one-third by the twilight. All that day it had been absorbed in little errands, and now, in its wake, caught up in the whirlwind of snowflakes, the street lanterns swirled after it. On the way home from the lycée, the name Scriabin, snow-covered, leapt from posters on to my shoulders, and I carried it home on the cover of my school satchel and it melted on to the window-sill. That worship ravaged me more fiercely and less deceptively than a fever. I envied it so that I went pale, then immediately blushed scarlet for having gone so pale. Scriabin spoke to me and I lost my wits entirely and, to the general amusement, heard myself make some quite unconnected answer, though what exactly I said I never heard. I was aware that he could sense all this, but not once did he offer me any help. That meant that he did not spare me and that was precisely the unresponsive, unshared feeling that I craved. That alone. And, the fiercer it was, the more did it protect me from the devastation wrought by his incommunicable music.

Before he left for Italy, he came round to say good-bye to us. He played—it was indescribable—he stayed to supper, he joined in a general discussion of life and death, he made small talk, he indulged in jokes. But all the time I had the impression that he was bored by the tedium of it. The time came for saying farewell. Parting wishes were expressed, and into a general pile of godsendings also fell a bleeding scrap of my own flesh and skin, all of which took place as, jostling one another in the doorway, we all made our way to the hall. In the hall we went through a short version of it all over again which had all the jerkiness of a summary and there was also a toggle

of his coat collar which for a long time would not enter the tight-stitched loop. Then the door banged to and the key was turned twice. As we came back to the piano, the ashen lighting of the music-stand of which, plus the disorder of three folders of music on it, was still eloquent of his playing, my mother sat down to glance through the studies he had left, and it only needed the first sixteen bars to create the suggestion, full of an amazing sort of readiness which nothing on earth could reward, for me hatless and coatless to go racing down the stairs and off down nocturnal Miasnitskaya Street to bring him back or at least get one more glimpse of him.

Everybody has experienced this. We have all had our tradition, promising us some person, and the promise has been kept differently every time. We have all of us become real individuals solely by reason of the sort of people we have loved or had the opportunity of loving. Never has tradition pretended to be the cry of an environment and been satisfied with a collective construction about itself, but has always shown us some one of its most decisive exceptions. Why then do the majority disappear into the form of a general concept which, if bearable, is only just sufferable? The majority have always shown a preference for the impersonal, rather than the personal. It comes from fear of those sacrifices which our traditional belief has demanded of our childhood. For while we are children our hearts have to love self-sacrificingly and unconditionally, with a passion proportionate to the square of distance.

III

Of course, I did not catch him up, in fact, most likely never even thought I would. We only met again six years later, when he had come back from abroad. This brings us well into my adolescence. Now, everybody is aware how unlimited are the horizons of youth. However many decades we subsequently add, they can never fill such an airfield. All they can do is keep flying back to it, singly or in bunches, by day or by

night, like training planes, to refuel. In other words, those are the years of our lives in which the part exceeds the whole, and when Faust experienced them a second time, he went through the inconceivable, an event measurable solely as a mathematical paradox

Scriabin came, and immediately there began rehearsals of the *Extase du Printemps* (How I would like to change that title, now so like those tight little bands round cakes of soap, and substitute another, more fitting!) They were held in the morning, and to get there I had to make my way through a foggy broth, by way of Furkasovsky and Kuznetzki streets, with their icy-cold kvass-and-spring-onion soup. All along that drowsy route through the fog the limp tongues of the church towers were lost behind the wet fingers of the night's icicles. From each of them one lonely bell would give a single gasping cry, while all the others stood mum, till all that bell-world yearned for some other's descant, but with all the long-suffering patience of their fasting bronze all refraining from such utterance. At the corner of Gazetny the church of St Nikita whipped egg and cognac flip in the soundless water-reach between the intercrossing streets. Wrought-iron runners gave voice as they came to that water's edge and the cobbles squeaked under the wands of the players in that orchestra.

At that time of the day the Conservatory was like a circus during morning chores. The cares round the ring were empty while the stalls slowly filled. Driven to the cold side under the whip, the music reached out a huge paw and slapped at the wooden casing of the organ. Suddenly the audience began flowing steadily in, as if from a town whose turn now it was to be cleaned up. And, thus released, an innumerable motley crowd surged in, multiplying at lightning speed, till by leaps and bounds they had covered the whole platform. Order was instilled and with feverish readiness the assembly hastened to accede, collapsing in one tremendous bass whirlwind, lifeless from end to end, an even mass the whole width of the footlights.

It was man's first colonization of the world discovered by Wagner for chimeras and mastodons. But these were scared

from the scene by kettle-drums and by cascades of chromatics from trombones as cold as firemen's hoses. In the space thus freed a lyrical dwelling-house was run up, no invention this, but the real equivalent of a whole universe of broken brick. Over the fence of this symphony blazed a van Gogh sun. But the window-sills were cluttered with Chopin's dusty archives. Into this, however, the tenants never poked their noses. Instead, with their whole way of life they strove to realize the finest heritage of their predecessor.

I was unable to hear the *Extase* without tears springing to my eyes. It had been carved in my memory even before the first plates left the engraver's bench. The hand that had written those notes had six years previously rested on my substance no less penetratingly. And what had all those years since been but further development of that living imprint with all the play of the whims of my growing up? It is not surprising that in that symphonic poem I should find an enviably radiant companion of my very own age. Having such a mate so close to me could not but be reflected in those close to me, and also in my work and environment. Here is how that influence was manifested.

More than anything else in the world I loved music, and in music more than any other composer, Scriabin. I had begun to hush music a little while before I first met him. By the time of his return I had become the pupil of a musician who is now a flourishing composer. It only remained for me to study orchestration. I was regarded as a promising pupil, though had I been decried it would have been just the same, for I could not conceive of any other life than that of music.

However, I lacked a sense of absolute pitch, as the ability to place any singly sounded musical note is called. The lack of that sense, which has no connection whatsoever with being musical, but which my mother possessed completely, gave me no rest. Had music really been the field for me that it seemed to the onlooker to be, I would never have been at all concerned to possess that sense of absolute pitch, because it is completely unessential. Indeed, I was aware that outstanding contemporary composers lacked it and that in all probability

neither Wagner nor Tschaikowsky had had it. But for me music was a cult, that is to say, it was the destructive focal-point of all that was most fanatical, superstitious and self-abnegating in me, and for this reason, whenever by night an inspiration gave wings to my will, with the advent of morning I hastened to humble it, never ceasing to point out to that urge what I lacked.

In spite of all this, I had however produced a number of serious compositions, and now had come the time to show them to my idol! The arrangement of an interview, such a natural thing, seeing that our two households were on a friendly footing, I regarded with my customary over-exaggeration. A step which in any other circumstances would have seemed overweening to me, here looked like blasphemy. And when on the appointed day I made my way to Glazovski, where Scriabin was for the time being domiciled, I did not so much take with me my compositions as a passion which had long since outgrown any form of expression, and with this I also took my apologies for the imagined indelicacy of which I considered myself guilty. The overfull No. 4 jostled and jolted those feelings of mine as it relentlessly bore them on towards that goal drawing ominously near as I passed through dun Arbat and, knee deep in water, shaggy, perspiring rooks and horses and foot-passengers drew me on towards Smolenski Market.

IV

I was then to test how conditioned our facial muscles are. With gullet closed by agitation and dried-up tongue I mumbled something, in between my brief replies swallowing frequent gulps of tea in order not to choke or make some awful blunder.

The skin shifted about on jutting jawbone and bulging forehead, I twitched my eyebrows, nodding and smirking, but every time that I put up my hand and touched those expressive corrugations, so ticklish and so tight drawn, I proved to be clutching and frantically crushing a handkerchief

with which again and again I wiped from my forehead tremendous beads of sweat. At my back, lashed together by the curtains, all down that little street the Spring was asteam. In front of me, between my hosts, doubled by the loquacity of those good folk striving to ease my embarrassment, the tea too was steaming in the cups, and the samovar was hissing, pierced through by an arrow of steam, while the sun crept on through heavens befogged by water and dung. Stringy as a tortoise-shell comb, the smoke of a cigar-end reached out of the ash-tray towards the light and, when it at last achieved its aim, climbed satiated sideways up it, as on a piece of rag. I do not know why, but that orbit of blinded air, steaming waffles, smoking sugar and silver that with not a moment of respite blazed like paper all augmented my embarrassment. It only began to subside when, moving on into the drawing-room, I found myself at a piano.

I was still agitated when I played my first piece, at the second I nearly bested it, while at the third it gave way entirely to that onrush of something quite new, quite unforeseen. And my glance then happened to fall on the man who was listening.

I played on. First, he raised his head, then up went his eyebrows. Finally, with radiant countenance he too rose in the air and, accompanying the fluctuations of the melody with elusive fluctuations of his smile, he floated down the rhythmic perspective of the music towards me. He was pleased with it all. I pushed on to the very end. At once he began to assure me that it would be unseemly to talk of musicianly gifts when he was confronted with so very much more. I was fated, he said, to add my word to music. Chasing after passages which had flashed by, he took his place at the piano, and repeated one which had attracted him most of all. The idiom in question was complex. I could never have expected him to reproduce it accurately. But as he did so there now came another great surprise—he had repeated it in another key! And there from under his fingers splashed the very shortcoming which all these years had so tortured me. It was also his own!

And again, giving preference to the eloquence of the fact as

against the unreliability of guesses, I was shaken by a shudder. My split thoughts went two ways. If he met my admission with the rejoinder: 'But, my dear Boris, I too have no sense of absolute pitch,' all would be well. That would mean that I was fated to be a musician, I was not foisting myself on music. But if in response he began to talk about Wagner and Tchaikowsky, about piano-tuners and so forth . . . I was already drawing near that agonizing subject and, interrupted in mid-phrase, was gulping down the answer: 'Absolute pitch? After all I've told you? What about Wagner, eh? And Tchaikowsky? And all the hundreds of tuners who possess it? . . .'

We paced the drawing-room up and down. He put his arm round my shoulders. He tucked it under mine. And he talked—about the harm of improvisation, and of when, with what purpose and how to compose. As models of the simplicity at which I should always aim he offered his latest sonatas, famous for their brain-racking character. Examples of the complexity to be condemned he drew from the most commonplace sentimental romances. The paradoxical nature of this comparison in no wise upset me. I was all agreement that lack of character was more complex than character itself, that the less substance there was in rhetoric, the more seemingly it appeared to be, and that it is only by being corrupted by the emptiness of the commonplace that when we first come to it after long being unused to it we tend to misunderstand the acme of concreteness as pretentiousness of form. Unnoticeably he passed to more definite pieces of advice. He enquired about my general education and, learning that I had chosen the law faculty because it was easy, counselled me immediately to change to the moral philosophy section of the historical and philosophical faculty, which I did the very next day. But while he was talking I was thinking of what had just happened. I did not break the bargain which I struck with fortune. I recalled the negative issue of that dilemma. Did that coincidence strip the crown from my deity? No, never—for from his former height it raised him to a new one. Why did he refrain from giving me that most simple answer, that I so

wanted from him? That was his secret. Someday, when already far too late, he was to present me with the omitted admission. But how in his own youth did he master his misgivings? That too remained a secret, one moreover that raised him to a yet greater height. But it was already dark in the room, the street-lamps were alight outside, it was high time I took my departure.

As I bid him good-bye I did not know how to thank him. Something rose within me, striving to get free. Something wept, something rejoiced

V

The first breath of street coolness was wafted from houses and distances. All together, they rose up to heaven, borne up from the cobbles by the single-mindedness of a Moscow night. I suddenly thought of my parents and all the questions that they were impatiently waiting to fire at me. However I put it, what I said could but have the happiest effect. It was only at last, here as I submitted to the logic of the conversation which lay before me, that I reacted to the day's events as to a fact. In their other form they did not belong to me. They only became real when intended for others. However exciting the news I bore home might be, I was uneasy at heart. But what began to look like delight was the awareness that this sorrow was one which above all I could never get into anybody's ears, and, like my future, it would remain down below, in the street, together with all Moscow, my Moscow, mine as never heretofore. I went by side streets, crossing from one side to another. Completely apart from me, a world which right up till the previous evening had seemed for ever natural to me was fragmenting and dissolving away. On I went, my strides increasing at every corner, not knowing that already, that very night, I was breaking off with music.

One evening, soon after that, attending a meeting of *Serdarda*, a tipsy confraternity founded by a dozen poets, musicians and artists, I suddenly remembered that I had

promised to bring Julian Anisimov (who previously had read some translations of Richard Dehmel's poetry) another German poet, whom I preferred to all his contemporaries. And again, as many a time too before, the collection *Mir zur Feier* appeared in my hands at this most difficult moment for me, and went off through the slush to the timber-built Razgulyai quarter of Moscow, a damp-sodden tangle of the old-world, of inheritance and of youthful promises, to return home later on that night quite stunned by the rooks in that upper room under the poplars, and with a new friendship, that is, sensing that there was still yet one more door in that city, indeed, that there were several. But here it is high time I related how that collection of poems fell into my hands.

The point of this is that it had been six years earlier, in that same December twilight which I have already twice tried to describe together with the noiseless street which everywhere had its eye on me from behind those mysterious grimaces of the snowflakes, I too shuffled about on my knees, helping my mother to tidy up my father's bookshelves. Already thoroughly dusted and fudged well in with a whisk on all four sides, these printed entrails were beginning to find their way back to the gutted shelving when all at once, from one pile, particularly sportive and disobedient, a small portion of those bowels suddenly extruded in the form of a volume in faded grey covers. Entirely by chance, I failed to tuck it back into place. Instead, finally gleaning it from the floor, I took it to my room with me. After a long lapse of time, I fell in love with that book, as soon after that I did again with another which joined it, inscribed to my father in the same handwriting. But still more time passed before one day I grasped that the author of them both, Rainer Maria Rilke, must be none other than that German whom one summer day, long, long since, we had left by the railside on the whirling precipice of a forgotten country halt. I hurried at once to my father to check my surmise, and, though very puzzled that this should so excite me, he confirmed it.

VI

The sun rose from behind the post office, then, settling down like a fruit jelly, it set over Neglinka. As it gilded our flat, after dinner it reached into the dining-room and the kitchen. It was a service flat, with rooms made out of classrooms. I was studying at the university. I was reading Hegel and Kant. The times were such that new gulfs opened up at every meeting with my friends, first one, then another producing a fresh discovery.

We frequently got each other up at dead of night. Invariably for some utterly unpostponable reason. Whoever was thus wakened would be ashamed of his drowsiness, as of the sudden exposure of a failing. To the alarm of the other unfortunate members of the family, we would then set out at once—as if it were into the next room—to go to Sokolniki, to the Yaroslavl Railway crossing. I was seeing a lot of a daughter of a well-to-do family. It was clear to everybody that I was in love with her. She only took part in those expeditions quite detachedly, in words which were less sleepy, more capable therefore of the task in hand. I was doing a little tutoring, for very low fees, not to be a burden on my father, and while the family were away in the summer stayed on in Moscow and kept myself. The illusion of independence reached a moderation in food such that in the end I crowned it with self-starvation, turning night into day in the deserted flat. Music, to which I was still postponing my farewell, was by now getting entangled with literature. The profundity and wonder of Byely and Blok could not remain a closed book to me. In its own way their influence combined with a force which was greater than any mere illiteracy. Fifteen years' abstention from letters, which had been sacrificed to music, condemned me to originality just as a deformity can condition a man to be an acrobat. Together with some of my acquaintanceship, I was concerned in Apollo Musagetes. From others I learned of the existence of Marburg. The place of Kant and Hegel was taken by Cohen, Natorp and Plato.

I deliberately give my life at this period an accidental quality. I could multiply these symptoms, or substitute others. However, those I give are sufficient for my purpose. But when, as in an architect's rough sketch, I use them to indicate what I then was, the question immediately rises in my mind of where and by what force did poetry arise out of this. I do not have to think long to find the answer, for this is the only emotion that memory has preserved for me in all its freshness.

Poetry was born from the interaction of these orders, from the differences in the action of one and another, from the more tardy of them lagging and piling up behind down a far-reaching prospect of things remembered.

The swiftest order of all was love. There were even moments when it proved to be at the head of nature itself, outstripping the sun. But such moments appeared only very rarely, hence one can say that what drew ahead, with a superiority which was constant, almost always rivalling love, was precisely that which as soon as it had gilded one flank of the house began to bronze the other, wiping one climate away by another as it turned the ponderous capstan of the year's four seasons. While the rear was brought up by all the other orders, at distances which merely varied in greatness. Often I caught the sound of the whistle of a yearning grief of which I was not the initiator. Catching me up from behind, that order used to frighten and distress me. It arose from an interrupted daily round and, first threatening to slow reality down altogether, finally craved to attach that round to the living air, which in the meantime had gone on far ahead. Such retrospection was indeed the essence of what is known as inspiration. And it was the most ephemeral, uncreative parts of existence that reached the greatest brilliance, by reason of the distance of their recoil. Still greater action came from unenthusiastic objects. Such were the models used for still-lives, those favourite forms of artists. Collecting in the utmost distance of the aesthetic universe and being in a state of immobility, they it was that provided the most complete concept of that universe's whole in its movement, just as does any landscape region with its seeming contrast. Their disposition defined the bounds beyond which

amazement and sympathy had no work to do. There it was science that worked, seeking out the atomic foundations of reality.

But since there was not any other universe from which one could take hold of the first by its high points (as if by the hair) and lift it up, for that operation (which the universe itself prompted) one had to take a representation of it, just as in algebra, which in relation to quantity is cramped by a like limitation to one plane. Nevertheless, I did see such representation merely as a way to get out of the difficulty, not as an aim in itself. That I always saw in the transposition of what was represented from cold co-ordinates to burning ones, sending life consumed chasing after life itself. That is how I then reasoned, not very differently indeed from my present outlook. We depict people in order to cloak them with a climate—a climate, or, which is one and the same thing, with nature—with our passion. We drag the everyday into prose for the sake of the poetry of it. We draw prose into poetry for the sake of the music of it. That in the broadest sense of the word was what I called art, established according to the clock of the living species with all its generations.

Here is the reason why my sensing of a town never corresponded to the actual place in which my life was being lived. A spiritual effort invariably thrust it back into the depths of the perspective described. There, clouds milled panting about and the fusing smoke of countless stoves thrust a way through their crowd and hung across the sky. There, strung out, as if on so many embankments, the houses fell to ruins and dipped their front porches in the snow. There they plucked the fragile ugliness of germination with soft guitar plectra and, tipping away, simmered down into steep, most embarrassed flights of steps, to emerge again with husbands tottering where the cabbies' breakers broke, as if from the hot room of a Russian bath-house with the scalding water splashed from its wooden pails, into the birch-brush coolth of the ante-room. There to disperse, there to glow, there to pour their acerbity over the bridesmaids, thence in satin to ride to the wedding church and pawn their furs. There the varnished grins of that

notorious set-up exchanged sly winks and my second-year pupils, as dazzlingly dull-witted as saffron is yellow, settled into their seats and got out their text-books, awaiting me and my lesson. There too, olive green, ebbed and flowed the hundred-halled murmur of the half-scorned university. When with the onset of dusk that appearance of time living also turned impersonal, the orphaned inertia of it was saddled by sheer sterility.

The pebbles of their spectacles swiftly surveying their watch-glasses, the liberalizing Zadopiatovs of all persuasions raised their heads to address the tiers and the vaulted ceilings. The students' heads came apart from their tunics, and dangled towards the green lampshades in their regular pairs.

After such visits to the town, made every day as if from another world from that in which I lived, I invariably had a madly quickened pulse. Had I in such moments consulted a doctor, he would have suspected malaria. But those were attacks of a chronic allergy which would never have yielded to quinine therapy. That strange miasma was caused by the persistent crudity of those worlds, their fluid obviousness, which nothing inward restrained to their advantage. They lived and moved just like artists' models in a studio. A sort of mental aerial of an infectious predetermination rose from their midst, to knit them into some sort of human settlement. The fever settled in precisely at the fundament of that imaginary pole, and it was the electric currents that this mast sent to the opposite pole that engendered it. In conversation with that other far-away mast of genius, this one called for a new Balzac to come to its own little world from those other regions. But one only needed to recede a short distance from that fateful pole for immediate tranquillization to ensue.

Thus, for instance, I felt no fever at Savin's lectures, because that professor was not the type at all. He spoke with genuine genius which expanded in direct proportion to his subject. Time was never offended by him. It never struggled to find a way out of his fortifications, never leapt up for a

breath of fresh air, never flung to the door. There was here never any down-draught into the flue. As his smoke broke free above the roof it never beat down or clung to the couplings of tram trailers sweeping away into the blizzard. No, as it plunged straight into England's middle ages or Robespierre's convention it drew us too with it and with us all else that we conceived of as alive beyond the university windows which swept so loftily up to the very moulding of the ceiling.

I also remained immune in a room in cheap furnished apartments where, with a number of other students, I taught a group of grown-up pupils. There nobody was dazzlingly brilliant. It was sufficient if, without expecting successors from any source, teachers and taught alike joined hands in a common effort to get off that dead point to which life was proposing to pin them. Like the teachers, among whom were graduates studying for their doctorate, the pupils were not very typical of their subjects. Small clerks in the government service and private business, workers, domestic servants and postmen, they attended merely in order some day to change their status.

I never became feverish in their practical company, and in rare moments of harmony with myself often as I left the place I turned down the next side street, where in a building set in the close of the Zlatoustinski Monastery whole guilds of florists flourished. Here it was that the boys who sold flowers of all kinds down the Petrovsky Boulevard stocked up with flora of the Riviera. The wholesalers, peasant types, imported the flowers from Nice, and here on the spot one could get such treasures for a mere trifle. I felt particularly drawn to them at that watershed in the school year when, just after my discovery one fine evening that it was possible to go on working without a light, those bright March evenings made a more and more frequent appearance in our dingy furnished rooms, till at last twilight ceased even to reach the threshold of the inn till studies were quite over. Then, for a change completely free from the head-muffling kerchief of winter night, there was the street suddenly springing up out of the ground by the porch, a strange, dry legend hovering on lips which scarcely

stirred. Over the lusty cobbles in sudden rustling runs came the spring air. And as they waited and waited for the evening star which the insatiate, fabulously agile heavens strove to hold back, the outlines of the side street shivered chill, as if indeed covered with a film of living skin.

The fug-laden courtyard room was packed ceiling high with empty foreign-made baskets plastered with fine-sounding Italian labels. In response to the felty creaking of the hinges, a cloud of greasy steam billowed out immediately one opened the door—as if under pressure, indeed, and one could already sense something unprecedentedly exciting inside. Immediately facing the entrance, in the depths of a main room with down-sloping ceiling a huddle of errand-boys clustered round a small barred window and, taking the carefully counted-out goods as they were handed to them, sorted them out in their baskets. In the same room sat the proprietor's sons, silently slitting open further supplies freshly brought in from customs. Slashed and opened up like a book, the orange-coloured lining would lay bare the fresh heart of the reed basket, and, set solid, the bunches of chilled violets would be taken out unbroken. They were like so many blue layers of desiccated *malaga*, but they flooded out that dismal yardman's stable with such intoxicating sweet scent that even the columns of early dusk and those shadows which spread across the floor might well have been tailored from some damp, dark purple greensward.

But the real marvels still lay ahead. Going to the far end of the yard, the proprietor unfastened one wing of the door of the stone-built stables, heaved up a cellar hatch by its iron ring, and in the same instant the story of Ah Baba and his forty thieves came true in all its dazzling light. On the floor of the dry basement, as blinding as sunlight, blazed four forked flashes of lightning.

In enormous vats, sorted out by colours and varieties, flaming bunches of paeonies, yellow daisies, tulips and anemones rivalled the lamps in their madness. They lay excitedly panting, as if wrestling with one another, and sweeping across it all with unexpected strength came a wave

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of some bright perfume, a watery scent inmixed with thin threads of aniseed, to wash away the dusty redolence of mimosa

It was the narcissi, as brilliantly perfumed as any infusion could be, adulterated to sheer whiteness. But even this full tempest of rivalry was further conquered by those dark cockades of the violets. Sultry and half insane, they hypnotized with that indifference of theirs, like eyes with no whites. Never sullied by cough of man, their sweet atmosphere surged out of the depths of the cellar and up the broad stairs, till one's lungs were all one rigid woodland congestion. As if it was by this scent, cheating the mind, that the spring months created their very concept of the earth which won them to their annual return, and the sources of the Greek myths of Demeter were somewhere close at hand.

VII

At this time and long after I looked on my verse-making essays as an unfortunate weakness, and expected nothing that was good from them. But there was one person, S. N. Durylin, who even at that time lent me the support of his approval. This was to be explained by his unprecedented responsiveness. From other friends, who had got used to seeing me turning into a musician in my own right, I painstakingly concealed those signs of a new adolescence. For this reason too I went on studying philosophy with serious enthusiasm, assuming that somewhere in that region lay the first steps in my future application to practical work. The scope of the subjects studied in our group was just as remote from the ideal as the method of instruction. It was a strange medley, out-of-date metaphysics and an enlightenment not yet fully fledged. For the sake of harmony both directions sacrificed the last remnants of what sense they might have had if taken apart. The history of philosophy was transformed into a dogmatic series of literary texts, while psychology became distorted into inflated journalistic twaddle. Young readers like Shpet,

Samsonov and Kubitzki were powerless to change this set-up. Yet even the senior professors were not entirely to blame for it. Their hands were tied by the current demand for everything to be taught with *abc* simplicity. Though the participants were far from realizing it, it was precisely at this time that the anti-illiteracy campaign was really launched. Those students who had some grounding did make an attempt to work independently, attaching themselves more and more to the model university library. Sympathies were divided between three names. The majority were taken up with Bergson. Adherents of the Göttingen school of Husserlianism found support in Shpet. Followers of the Marburg school were without any leadership at all. Left to themselves, they found a unifying force in chance channels of personal tradition, which went back as far as S. N. Trubetskoy.

The phenomenon of this group was young Samarin. A direct offshoot of the best Russian past, and in addition connected by various fine degrees of kinship with the history of that building at the corner of Nikitsky Boulevard, about twice a term he would turn up at some study group or other, rather like a son, already living on his own, dropping in when the family were all gathered round the dinner-table. Whoever was reading a paper would at once break off and wait while, stumbling across the creaky boards to the very end bench of the timber-built amphitheatre, and embarrassed by the hush which he himself had caused and was prolonging, that lanky eccentric found a seat for himself. But as soon as discussion began, all that rumbling and squeaking of boards which had but a moment before with such effort found its way up to the gods would come tumbling down again in an entirely new, unrecognizable form. Quarrelling with the very first qualifying phrase of the paper-reader. Samarin would use it as a basis for an extempore assault on Hegel or on Cohen and bring either bounding down the ribby terraces of that huge match-board storehouse like a ball. He would wax excited, swallowing his words. He naturally spoke loudly and throughout would keep his voice on the one level note which he had adopted at birth and was to keep to the grave, a note which was ignorant

alike of sinking to a whisper or being raised, but with an inseparable rounded lisp always immediately revealed the man's breeding. In a second, without stirring an inch away, a ball of high-sounding and independent words would be transformed into a ball of words which were calm and uttered in a manner which suggested that they merely needed to sound to be turned into deed. Samarin thought aloud, that is, with such accuracy in the sequence of his thoughts that to the majority, for whom prejudice had become a second language, he remained incomprehensible. When later I had lost sight of him, there were two occasions when I involuntarily recalled him. Once was when, reading Tolstoy, I came up against him again in Nekhliudov, the other when, at the Ninth Congress of the Soviets, I first heard Vladimir Ilich [Lenin]. I am of course speaking of the absolutely intangible, that is, I am allowing myself one of those analogies by which an approach was made to the crafty, keen-dealing peasant, not to speak of many others less reassuring.

Although that summer café on the Tverskoy Boulevard had no special name, everybody knew it as the Café Grec. It did not close for the winter though in that season its purpose became an enigma. One day, quite by chance, Loks, Samarin and I met in that deserted pavilion. We were not merely its only visitors that evening, but for all I know the only ones hitherto throughout the whole of that winter season. We were now well on the way to warmer days, and there had been a breath of spring in the air. No sooner had Samarin entered than he joined us at our table and began talking philosophy. Arming himself with a biscuit, he proceeded to mark the logical divisions of his discourse with this instrument as if it were a regal tuning-fork. Through the pavilion now stretched a segment of Hegel's infinity. It consisted of a series of alternate assertions and confutations. I must have told Samarin what subject I had chosen for my doctor's thesis, for he suddenly leapt from Leibnitz and mathematical infinity to dialectical infinity. And then, all at once, he began to talk about Marburg.

It was the first I had ever heard about it—the town, I mean, not the university. Later on I was to come to the

conclusion that there could have been no other way of talking about Marburg's antiquity and poetry, but at the time that lover's description, against the chattering of the ventilator fan was a complete surprise to me. Suddenly, startling the proprietor out of his wits—the man was having a nap over his paper in the corner—Samarin recalled that he had not come into the Café Grec to while away a *café* hour, he had not meant to stay more than a minute. Next, discovering that after all the telephone was out of order, he bundled himself out of that hibernal roost even more noisily than he had entered.

After a few minutes we too left. The weather had changed. Springing up suddenly, a wind was broadcasting white buckwheat. It came in gusts, which settled on the ground in whorls and figures of eight, beautifully executed. In that frenzied knotting there was a spirit of the sea. Just like that, in concentric layers, do sailors coil ropes and nets. As we made our way thence, Loks more than once tried to mount his Stendhal hobby-horse, while I countered him by dumb periods of silence, which were indeed not a little aided by the blizzard. I could not get out of my mind what I had just heard, and I was full of regrets for that precious city on which, so it seemed to me, like my own ears, I should never set eyes.

This was in February, and there in April was my mother one morning telling me that she had been putting aside part of her earnings and housekeeping money, and saved two hundred roubles, and thus she was going to give me, advising me to have a spell abroad. Both the unexpectedness of that gift and the joy it brought are indescribable. So too were my lack of merit and the present's quite unsurpassable real value. A great deal of bad piano-strumming had had to be endured to save such a sum. However, I lacked the strength to decline it, and it was by no means difficult for me to choose my route. In those days the universities of Europe were permanently in touch one with another. I set to work that very same day chasing about offices, and together with a handful of papers also bore off from Mohovaya Street something of real value. This was the detailed Marburg *List of Lectures*

for the summer semester of 1912, a document which had left the press only a fortnight previously. Pencil in hand I studied this prospectus continuously and did not even part from it in the street or while waiting on the wrong side of the grilles of official places. My madness breathed happiness a whole *verst* away, and by infecting secretaries and junior clerks alike with it I contrived without realizing it to speed up what anyway was not a very complicated procedure.

My programme, of course, was a Spartan one. Third-class travel, and, if necessary, even fourth-class abroad, and by the slowest and cheapest trains too, then a room in some hamlet on the outskirts of the town and a diet of bread and cooked sausage and tea. My mother's self-sacrifice obliged to be ten times as sparing. Her money ought to afford me a glimpse of Italy as well as Marburg, besides which I was aware that the university entrance fees and those for various study groups and lectures would swallow an appreciable portion. But had I had ten times the money, I would not have departed one iota from my scheme. I do not know on what I would have spent the remainder, but in those days nothing on earth would have transferred me to a second-class carriage or made me leave any residue on a restaurant table-cloth. Toleration regarding the domestic amenities which with the appearance of a family amounted to a real need for comfort I did not conceive till after the war. This did put such obstacles in the way of that world which had not allowed any ornament or indulgence in my room that although it was only its inspiration that kept me consistent on this point, for a time it could not fail to give way.

VIII

In Russia there was still snow about, and out from under the crust of slush on the waters floated sections of the sky, just like pictures from a transfer paper, but throughout Poland the apple trees were ablaze with blossom while with aestival sleepfreeness that land rushed from morning into night and

from west to east, as if a Romance portion of the Slavonic concept. Berlin appeared to me to be a city of youths issued the previous day with gifts of sabres and helmets, walking-sticks and pipes, real bicycles and frock coats—just like grown-ups. And I had caught them in their first moment out. They were still not accustomed to their changed condition, every man jack putting on airs as he paraded those presents that fortune had just brought him. In one of the more magnificent streets I was halted by Natorp's *Guide to Logic* suddenly calling out to me from a bookshop window. I went in to buy it with the tense feeling of one who the next day was actually to see that man in the flesh.

I had already spent one of the two nights of my journey without sleep as I passed through Germany and now another lay before me. It was only in Russia that third-class seat backs could be hinged up to make night bunks. Abroad, if one travelled cheap, one had to get what night rest one could nodding four in a row on a deep-bottomed wooden bench partitioned out by arm-rests. But although on this occasion both benches were completely at my disposal, I was in no mood for sleep. It was only rarely, with long gaps in between, that passengers appeared, and only for a station or two, mostly students. Without a word they would bow to me, then immediately sink into a tepid nocturnal vacancy. At every new relay of such fellow-travellers, cities sunk in slumber came rolling in under the station roofing. For the first time in my life, a genuine medieval world was revealed to me. Like any original work, the genuine quality of it was both fresh and frightening. With a clatter of names as familiar as naked steel my journey selected them one by one from the descriptions I had read—as if from the dusty scabbards that historians have made. Approaching each, the train strung out at full length, a miracle of ten steel coaches in a clanking chain. The leather casing of the corridor links puffed and flapped like a smithy's bellows. As the station lights flicked on them, the beer gleamed clear in its clean bottles. Over the stone-flagged platforms empty luggage trucks receded with dignity on thick wheels which also seemed to be of stone. Under the arching

roofs of huge loading platforms the trunks of short-snouted locomotives gleamed with perspiration. One had the impression that their low-set wheels had danced, to bring them so high, then suddenly halted in full motion, stranding them there. And from all sides the ancestors of six hundred years reached out towards that vacant concrete.

Quartered by sloping lattice timbers, the walls rolled out their picturesque, drowsy ornamentation, their façades crowding with pages, knights, maidens and ginger-haired cannibals, the check laths of the fencing repeated as ornament in the checked vizors of helmets, in the gaps in the cylindrical sleeves and in the criss-cross lacing of their doublets. They rushed at the lowered window and came close up to eyes and to throat. Shaken at last, I lay on the window's broad midriff, forgetting myself as I whispered now obsolete cries of rapture. But it was still dark, the leaping paws of the creeper scarce showed dark against the stucco, and when I was again hit by the full blast of the hurricane with its response of coal-dust and dew and roses, and all at once showered with a handful of sparks from the hands of the frenzied flying night, I quickly set to raising that window again, to give myself over to thought of the unforeseeable events of the day which lay before me. But I ought to say at least something about where I was bound, and for what purpose.

The final creation of that brilliant man, Cohen—the work was begun by his predecessor in the chair, Friedrich Albert Lange, known to us by the *History of Materialism*—the Marburg direction in philosophy won me over by two of its features. It was first of all entirely original, breaking fundamentally with everything else, starting on totally new ground. It did not partake of the indolent, ready-made ways of any of the *isms*, which invariably cling to their tenth-hand pretensions to universal knowledge, but are really without exception ill-informed and for one reason or another invariably timorous of any revision in the libertarian air of ancient culture. In no way the slave of terminological inertia, the Marburg school turned to prime sources, that is, to those genuine inventories of ideas which human thought has

accumulated in the history of science. Whereas current philosophy speaks of what this or that writer thinks and formal logic teaches us how to reason at the baker's so as to be sure of getting the correct change, what interested the Marburg school was what at the white-hot springs, the very sources of world discoveries, science thought in the never-ceasing flow of its literature in the twentieth century. In this form, authorized, so to speak, by the very history of attitudes of mind, philosophy was rejuvenated and became unrecognizably sensible, transformed from a discipline that was dubious into the fundamental discipline of problems, which is exactly what it should be.

The second feature of the Marburg school proceeded directly from the first and consisted in its astute and meticulous attitude regarding the historical heritage. A supercilious attitude to the past, as to a sort of poor-house in which a huddle of old men in *khlamys* and sandals (or perhaps wig or doublet) produce endless *a priori* fictions, to be excused by the whims of the Corinthian, of the Gothic, the Baroque or what have you other architectural order or style, was foreign to it. A unitary system of scientific structure was for this school as much a rule as the anatomical identity of historical man. Knowledge of history at Marburg was very thorough and they never tired of drawing treasure after treasure out of the archives of the Italian renaissance or from French or Scots rationalism or any other poorly studied school. History at Marburg was viewed unflinchingly and in Hegelian fashion, that is, with brilliant generalization, though at the same time within the strict limits of a healthy sense of responsibility. Thus, the school never spoke of stages of the world spirit, but would for instance tackle the family correspondence of the Bernulli family, though at the same time it remained keenly aware that any ideas, however remote their period, are, if taken in their proper setting, after the event, that is, after the discovery of a law of nature or after any other legislative act whatsoever, entirely accessible to logical comment by us. Otherwise, an idea would lose all direct interest for us and pass into the sphere of the archaeologist or the historian of costume,

of ways of living, of literature, of socio-political trends or some other such subject.

Both these characteristics (independence and historical sense) say nothing about the content of Cohen's system, but I had not intended and do not mean to attempt to discuss its essence. They do however speak for its genuineness, that is to say, for the vital position that it occupies in the living tradition by reason of the vital communication which it makes from its own generation, from the heart of this

As one of its particles, I thus sped my way to the gravitational centre. The train was running through the Harz country. In the smoking break of day thousand-year-old coal-mining Goslar leapt from the forest and flashed by. Later, Göttingen swept past us. The names of these towns rang ever more loudly in one's ears. Most of them were brushed unceremoniously to one side by the unswerving train. I sought out the name of every one on the map as it rolled by. Round me rose ancient details drawn into the orbit of those towns like satellites and rings. Sometimes the horizon would spread out as in the *Last Judgement* and the world would get as agitated as the night sky with many a castle and town smoking into view at the same time.

For two years before this journey the word *Marburg* had been constantly on my lips. It found mention in the chapters on the Reformation in every Russian high-school textbook. The *Posrednik* publishing house had issued a children's story-book about Elizabeth of Hungary, buried here early in the thirteenth century. Every life of Giordano Bruno referred to Marburg as one of the towns in which he lectured on his fateful Odyssey from London to Venice. And yet, improbable though it may seem, not once had I in Moscow guessed the identity which existed between the Marburg of those references and that on whose account I had nibbled at tables of derivatives, and differentials, and from Maclaurin leapt ahead to Maxwell, definitely beyond my reach. It was not till I had taken my baggage and gone past the post-house and hostelry of the days of chivalry that I first realized this sameness. Then I stood transfixed, my head thrown back. Above me hung a dizzy

steep on which one above the other reared stone models of the University, the Town Hall and the eight-hundred-year-old Castle. I had thus not taken more than ten steps before I no longer fathomed where I was. I then realized that I had left all connexion with the remaining world in the train, which was irrevocably bearing it on farther, together with its luggage-racks and ashtrays. Just under the clock on the tower above hung idle clouds. To them the position was familiar. But they offered no explanation. It was obvious that as sentinels watching over this nest they never absented themselves. A midday silence reigned and linked up with that other silence which was unfolded across the plain below. Together they brought my amazement to a peak. The upper silence addressed the lower with a pungent redolence of lilac. Birds twittered expectantly. I scarcely saw anything human. Immobile, the roof outline wondered what it would all end in. Gothic gnomes held the streets to those slopes, ranging them one above the other, so that the attics of one and the cellars of the next could peer into each other's windows, and all those narrow channels were lined with marvels of match-box architecture. Outspreading, the upper floors propped themselves up with banded timbers. With roofs all but touching, the houses joined hands above the paving stones. There were no sidewalks. Some were so narrow it seemed even foot-passengers could not pass. All at once I understood that, of course, Lomonosov's five-year-long treading of these very cobbles was preceded by that day on which, bearing a letter to Leibnitz's pupil Christian Wolf, he first entered this town, knowing not a soul. Merely to state that from that day to when I first saw it Marburg had not changed is not enough. One should be aware that already in those distant days it was just as unexpectedly tiny and ancient. And, looking about one, it was not surprising if a certain now distant bodily reaction was repeated, and I shuddered. Just as on that day when Lomonosov had his first impression, seeing the whole town spread out before him under its motley of roofs of dove-grey tile and slate, now too it was just like a flock of pigeons by sorcery caught in full flight in transformation to another magic

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course. Yes, I trembled as I thus coped with the two-hundredth anniversary of another man's neck muscles. Then, coming to myself, at last I observed that the *décor* had changed back to reality, and I set out to find that cheap inn of which Samarin had advised me

PART TWO

I

I TOOK a room on the outskirts of the town. It was in one of the last houses out on the Giessen road, at a point where the chestnuts lining the road dressed, shoulder to shoulder, and the whole column of them suddenly veered to the right. After which, with one more glance back at the frowning knoll with its miniature, old-world town, the high-road plunged into the forest.

Outside my window was a rickety little balcony which overhung the next-door garden, where stood an obsolete Marburg tramcar, taken off its wheels and transformed into a hen-house.

The room was let to me by the elderly widow of a civil servant, who lived together with her daughter on a very lean pension. The two women were as alike as two peas. As is frequent with women stricken with goitre, they were always catching one's eyes creeping sily to their neat little collars. But what I saw in such moments were childrens' balloons lashed tightly together, neck to neck. Perhaps they guessed this.

Through *their* eyes—which, laying one's hand gently on their throats, one felt one wanted to use as safety valves—it was an old-world Prussian quietism that peeped out on the universe.

Nevertheless, they were not at all characteristic of that part of Germany. The prevalent type was a central German one. Indeed, even in the very countryside there were hints of the south and the west, of the existence of Switzerland and France. And it was most fitting when confronted in a shop window with that country's fresh, green hints of foliage to turn the pages of French editions of Leibnitz and Descartes.

On the far side of the fields, which reached right up to this ingenious bird-roost, could be seen the village of Ockerhausen, a strung-out establishment of long lattice-wall barns, long wagons and worthy Percherons. From this point another high-road ran round the horizon. As it entered the town it became the *Barfusserstrasse*—in the Middle Ages Franciscan monks were known as the 'barefoot brigade'.

It must have been up that road every year that winter came to Marburg, for when one looked out that way from my balcony, it was easy to see how much of Hans Sachs fitted. That is to say, one could imagine the Thirty Years' War. One imagined, in short, a Nature which was sleepy and never agitated, a Nature compacted of historical misery measured not by the hour, but by decades. Winter after winter after winter. And then, after the traverse of a century as desert chill as a cannibal yawn, there came the first foundation of new settlements under vagrant skies, in places withdrawn somewhat from the wild-grown Harzland—and with names as black as burned-out sites, names like *Elend* and *Sorge* [Poverty and Anxiety].

Behind this, to one side of the house, subordinating bushes and thickets and reflections, flowed the River Lahn. Beyond this ran the ribbon of the railway. The gentle murmur of the kitchen spirit-lamp would in the evening hours be suddenly broken by the swift jangling of the mechanical, clockwork bell, to the sound of which the automatic crossing-bar came down across the road. Then in the darkness by the tracks up rose the figure of a man in uniform to warn off the dust rapidly sprinkling him from a perforated nozzle, and in the very same instant the train swept past, to fling itself spasmodically upwards and downwards and on all sides at the same time.

Sheaves of its thrumming light would fall on my landlady's pots and pans. And the milk would burn in the saucepan, without fail.

Into the Lahn's waters would slip a star or two. In Ockershausen, driven in for the night, the cattle would low. And up on the hill Marburg would break into operatic light. Were it feasible for the Grimm brothers to come there again to study law under that celebrated jurist, Savigny, as they had done one hundred years previously, they would once again have graduated as collectors of fairy tales.

Making sure that I had got the door key, I set out for the town. The real citizens were already snug in bed. I met only students. They were all on the stage at once, just like Wagner's *Meistersinger*. The houses, which even in daylight looked like a stage setting, were now huddled more closely together. The street lamps strung over the cobbles from wall to wall had no elbow room. With all the strength it could command, their light attacked every sound, smothering the hubbub of receding heels and bursts of loud German talk with its lily-like gleams. One might well have believed that even the electricity knew all about the traditions of the place.

Long, long ago, half a millennium before Lomonosov's time, when on earth the everyday year was the twelve hundred and thirtieth of our era, down those slopes from Marburg Castle came a living figure of history, Elizabeth of Hungary.

That is so far, far away that if one does get there in imagination, a blizzard of snow intervenes just as one finally reaches the distant point, a blizzard arising from the increasing cold by reason of the laws governing conquest of the unattainable. At that point night begins, the hills cloak themselves with forest, and in that forest wild animals breed. The morals and customs of men become coated with ice.

The confessor of that saint to be, canonized only three years after her death, was a tyrant. That is to say, he was a man devoid of imagination. That sober, matter-of-fact person now perceived that the mortifications of penance to which this woman was being subjected were raising her to a state of ecstasy. In search of tortures which she might really experience

as torture he now forbade her to continue to succour the poor and the sick. And here legend takes the place of history. Alleging that self-denial proved to be beyond her power. Alleging that to whiten her sin of disobedience a blizzard of snow concealed her on her path down to the lower town and during her nocturnal perambulations transformed her bread into flowers.

Thus, when a convinced disbeliever insists too much on the execution of his laws, Nature does sometimes have to depart from hers.

It matters not that the voice of the laws of Nature is here cloaked in a miracle. Such is the criterion of reliability in a religious age.

As, flying in under the hill, it approached the university, the street grew ever more crooked, ever narrower. In the façade of a house toughened in the ashes of the centuries like a baked potato-skin there was a glass door. This gave on to a passage, and the passage led out to one of the northern cliffs. Here, lit by electric light, was a terrace full of small tables. It was suspended over those lowlands which had once caused the *Landgrave* so much anxiety.

Established along the path of her nocturnal sallies, by the mid-sixteenth century Marburg had become petrified on the hill in the form it had then taken. But the lowlands which had so persistently robbed Elizabeth of Hungary of peace of mind, those lowlands which had made her break the prescriptions laid down for her, those lowlands which—as in the years before her time—were set in motion by miracles, had gone on striding forward, completely in step with them.

Night damp now rose therefrom. Down in that world steel cannonaded against steel, as sidings linked up and unlinked, shuttling to and fro. Every now and then something very noisy fell and was raised again. Till morning came, the roar of the sluice waters maintained unchanged the deafening note they had assumed as night descended. At the interval of a third, the air-fending whine of the sawmills sang seconds to the bullocks at the slaughter-house. Every now and then something broke, something flared up, something snorted

steam, something was overturned. Something writhed as it drew crimsoned smoke over itself.

The café was mainly patronized by philosophers. Others had their own gathering-places. On that terrace sat G——w and L, both Germans, who were later to obtain chairs in their own country and abroad. Amid the Danes, the English girls, the Japanese and all the others who had rallied here from all parts of the world to hear Cohen, a familiar, excited sing-song voice was already making itself heard. This was a Barcelona lawyer who was a pupil of Stammmler's, an active figure in the recent Spanish revolution, who had since the year before been completing his education at Marburg. He was reciting Verlaine to his friends.

I had now got to know a large number of people at Marburg. I was a stranger no longer. Having succeeded in biting off two responsibilities, with some alarm I was preparing for the day when I should have to face the Rector and undergo examination on Leibnitz and Hardtmann and one part of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. By now the very form of the Rector, who after a long existence based purely on my conjectures had at first meeting far from lived up to my expectations, had become my own property, had, that is to say, begun an arbitrary existence within me, changing his nature according to whether he submerged to the very bottom of my utterly unselfish enthusiasm or floated to the surface, when with all the heady ambition of a mere tyro what I wondered was whether he would ever take notice of me. Would I, in fact, be invited to one of his Sunday dinners. For that was an event which invariably raised a man in the eyes of Marburg, since it automatically marked the beginning of a philosophical career.

In this teacher I was in due course to observe all the dramatic nature of the inner world of such a great man's giving. I came to know exactly how that shock-headed bespectacled veteran would suddenly raise his head high, as he enlarged on the Greek conception of immortality, and how his arm would make its great sweep through the air, towards the Marburg Fire Station, when he interpreted the concept of the Elysian Fields. Or how on some other occasion, having

craftily weaved his way round to pre-Kantian metaphysics, he would begin to coo sweetly about that sort of philosophy and seem to flirt with it, only suddenly to utter a raucous caw and then deal it a frightful straight left with quotations from Hume. Next would come that savage clearing of the throat and that long-drawn-out pause, after which, in mild and wearied voice he would drawl. '*Und nun, meine Herren . . .*' [And now, gentlemen. . .] And that would signify that the *commedia* was over, that a whole age stood condemned, and we could now go back to the subject we were really studying.

By this time, almost nobody was left on the café terrace. The electricity was turned off. And it proved to be already day. We went to the railings and peered down, to convince ourselves that the nocturnal lowlands were no more. Nor did the panorama which had taken their place know anything whatsoever about its predecessors there.

II

About this time the V——e sisters visited Marburg. Their parents were very affluent. In Moscow, as far back as my high-school years I had been the friend of the elder of the two girls and had given her occasional lessons, I am not quite sure of what—the most likely thing is that the family paid me anyway and I delivered dissertations on the most unenvisioned subjects.

But in the spring of 1908 it so happened that we both of us completed our school careers together and simultaneously with my own swotting I undertook to tutor her. Most of my register-cards included gaps, where I had light-heartedly omitted to work at the right time, when this or that section of a subject was being studied in class. I had not sufficient nights now at my disposal to make all this up. Yet I did somehow succeed in snatching the time, regardless of the clock. More often than not day was already breaking when I would race round to V——a to work at subjects which were not always quite in step with my own, because the schedules

of work in our respective schools naturally enough did not quite coincide, a twist which rather complicated the situation for me, though I was unaware of it. But as for my feelings for V—a, far from new as they were, of those I had been aware since I was fourteen.

V—a was lovely, she had great charm, and she had been exquisitely brought up, spoiled indeed, from early childhood, by an elderly French governess who was quite ignorant of her spirit. This governess was well aware, however, that the geometry which at screech of dawn I brought her pet was more that of Abelard than of Euclid, and, brightly making a great ado of her perspicacity, she never once left us alone to our lessons. For this interference I was secretly grateful to her. While she was present my precious emotions could remain immaculate. Not that I condemned either them or myself I was eighteen years old. But whatever the situation, my mental make-up and upbringing had been such that I should never have dared let my feelings have free play.

All this took place in that season in which folk were busy pouring boiling water into crocks to knock up distemper and, left to themselves, gardens still cluttered with snow piled in from everywhere else were idly sunning themselves. To their very limits they swam with limpid, still waters, while, beyond their borders, out on the other side of the walls and fences, all along the horizons stood the gardeners, in serried ranks with the rooks and the belfries, all across the town exchanging loud observations—as many as two or three words a day. Full of lingering remnants of the night, the dank, shaggy grey heavens rubbed their muzzle against the open casement. For hours on end, hours and hours, they maintained silence, then, suddenly stirring into action, sent rolling into my room the tiny, round rumble of a wagon wheel, and so unexpectedly too that it might have been all part of a boisterous country game and that wagon had nothing better to do than leap from cobbles to casement, so that now it would not have to cart any more. Still more mysterious, however, was the vacancy of silence which burst bubbling as if from many springs into the deep rut that the clamorous wheel had cut.

Why all this should be imprinted on my mind in the form of a schoolroom blackboard not quite cleaned of its chalk, I do not know. Oh, if only we had been halted then, the blackboard washed till it gleamed damp and black, and instead of theorems about pyramids of equal dimensions, copperplate writing, all thick and thin, had set out before our eyes what lay before us in the years to come, oh how aghast we would have been!

Whence that thought, and why did it come to me precisely at that point?

Because it was spring, spring with its blackness, at last winding up the tenantry of the cold half of the year, and all round me, facing upwards, like so many mirrors yet to be hung up, all over the land lay lakes and pools, eloquent of the fact that the madly capacious world had now been cleaned up, and the apartment was ready for a new letting. Because in that moment it was free for whoever wanted to embrace and experience all the life our world contains. Because I was in love with V——a.

III

There is however in the world what is known as a sublimer attitude towards woman. I am going to say a few words about this. There is a vast circle of phenomena which in adolescence can drive to suicide. There is a circle of errors of the youthful imagination—the distortions of childhood, the hunger-strikes of youth, a circle of *Kreutzer Sonatas* and of sonatas written against the *Kreutzer Sonatas*. I have been in that circle, and I spent a shamefully long time in it too. What exactly is it all?

It frets one away. It does nothing but harm. Yet man will never be free from it. Everything by which we make history will always go through it. Because these sonatas which constitute the ante-room to the only complete moral freedom are not written by the Tolstoys or the Wedekinds, but by Nature herself, using their hand. And her concept is only to be seen in full in their mutual contradictoriness.

Having based matter on mutual resistance and separated fact from illusion by a wall called *love*, Nature is as concerned about the solidity of that wall as she is about the wholeness of the world. Here is where the insanity and the diseased exaggerations of love begin. Here one can with all truth say that love cannot take a single step without making a mountain out of a molehill.

But, sorry, does not Nature then make real mountains? I am told this is her principal occupation. Or are those mere words? What of the history of species? Of the history of human names? After all, this is precisely where Nature prepares them—in dammed off sectors of living evolution, at those barriers where her exacerbated imagination lets itself go.

Would it not therefore be possible to say that we exaggerate in childhood and our imagination goes crazy *because* in this period of our lives Nature is turning us, as molehills, into mountains?

Holding the philosophic outlook by which only the *almost-impossible* is real, Nature has made the emotions of everything that lives extremely difficult. She has made them difficult in one way for the animal world, in quite another, for the vegetable. The way she has fashioned those difficulties for man reveals her high opinion of him. She has made our emotions difficult for us not by any automatically acting trickery, but by something which at a glance from her is endowed with absolute power. She has made those difficulties for us by the sensation of our own mole-hill insignificance, which attacks each of us in direct proportion to how far removed we are from the molehill stage. This was expressed brilliantly by Andersen in his *Ugly Duckling*.

Like the word *sex* itself, all the literature about the subject breathes an insufferable commonplaceness and this is its purpose. It is solely by reason of that hateful quality that it can be of any use to Nature, for her contact with us happens to be based on fear of the commonplace, and nothing that was not commonplace could possibly serve her as her means of supervision.

Whatever material our thought may produce about the

subject, its *fate* is in her hands. And with the aid of instinct brought in by Nature out of the whole to be of assistance to us, she invariably makes such use of that material that all the efforts that teachers of the young may direct towards making naivety easy, ineluctably hamper it, and *that is how it should be*.

This is necessary so that our emotions should really have something to struggle against. If not this panic, then some other. And no matter at all what detestable thing, what nonsense, goes to the making of the barrier. The impulse by which the barrier is engendered is the purest in the whole universe. And that purity alone which has conquered such countless times through the centuries, would be enough by itself for all else to stand out as abysmal filth.

There is also art. This is not interested in man, but in the symbol of man. And, so it appears, the symbol of man is greater than man himself. It can however be engendered solely in motion. Though not any motion. Only in the passage from molehill to mountain.

What does an honest man do when he speaks *solely* the truth? While the truth was being uttered, life moved on, and the truth which was uttered had lagged behind, a deceptive truth. Is it really necessary for man to go on and on talking, everywhere and always?

But in art, you see, man is gagged. In art man himself becomes silent, and it is the symbol that speaks. And it seems that *solely* symbols can keep pace with the achievements of Nature.

The Russian verb *vraty** means *to introduce something superfluous* rather than *to try to deceive*. It is in this sense that art 'lies'. Its symbols embrace life itself. They are not in search of an audience. The truths of art are not representational. They are however on the other hand capable of eternal development. It is *solely* art which through the centuries in its assertions about love has not found itself at the disposal of instinct, as yet another means of hampering emotion. As it leaps the barriers of new spiritual development

* Usually translated to *lie*

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a generation preserves its lyrical truth, rather than, as one might imagine from a very great distance, throwing it aside. It is as if it is indeed in the form of lyrical truth that humanity is gradually assembled by the generations

All this is unusual. It is all breathtakingly difficult

It is taste that teaches us moral ways, while taste itself is taught by strength.

IV

The sisters had been spending the summer in Belgium. From a third party they learned that I was at Marburg. At this juncture they were called to join their family in Berlin, and on the way there they felt they should look me up.

They put up at the best hotel in our little town, in the oldest part of Marburg. The three days, every hour of which I spent with them, were as unlike my usual life as any festival is like a working day. Endlessly relating one thing and another to them, I soaked myself in their smiles and the indications they gave of really understanding whomever they happened to meet. I took them around with me and they were both of them to be seen with me at university lectures. And then came the day of their departure!

The evening before, as he prepared the table for supper, the waiter remarked to me: '*Das ist wohl Ihr Henkersmahl, nicht wahr?*' i.e., 'Enjoy your last meal, tomorrow it's the gallows for you, is it not?'

When I entered the hotel that morning, I met the younger sister in the corridor. She gave me one look and then, realising something, slipped back into her room without even bidding me good morning and locked herself in. I went on to the elder one's room, and there, terribly agitated, told her that things could not go on like that, she must decide my fate. Apart from my insistence, there was of course nothing new in all this. V—a rose quickly from her chair and, faced by my obvious agitation, which seemed about to fall on her, stumbled back, away from me. Then, suddenly, as she reached the wall, she remembered that there did exist a way of putting a stop to

all that without any fuss and—she rejected me. A moment later came a thudding in the corridor outside. It was a trunk being dragged from the next room. It was followed at once by a knock at the door. Swiftly, I made myself presentable. It was time to go to the station. This was five minutes' walk away.

There, the ability to say good-bye left me entirely, I had scarcely realized that I had said good-bye to the younger, but not even begun to do so to the elder, when there along the platform loomed the fast train from Frankfurt and almost in the same movement had swiftly taken up its passengers and was starting out again. I raced along beside it and at the end of the platform—the train then going full tilt—leapt on to the footboard. The heavy door at the end of the coach had not yet been banged to. A furious conductor barred my way, at the same time supporting me with one arm round my shoulder, in case I was mad enough, shamed by his remonstrances, to commit suicide. My departing visitors now hurried out to the corridor end and to save me thrust into the conductor's hand the wherewithal to pay my fare. And he relented. I went into the compartment with the sisters, and on we rushed, heading for Berlin. My fabulous fairy-tale holiday, so nearly truncated, was thus prolonged, increased tenfold by the furious speed with which we were rushing and a blissful headache from all I had gone through.

I had jumped on to the train footboard merely to bid her good-bye, but now again forgot to do this, only once more to remember it when it was already too late. For I had not really come to myself when the day was gone and evening had come, and the panting, reverberating roof of the Berlin terminus towered over us and pinned us to the ground. The sisters were to be met at the station. It was undesirable for me to be seen with them in the agitated state I was in. They convinced me that now we really had said good-bye. It was merely that I had not noticed it. And there I was, tight in the grip of the gaseous booming of the station, and sank in the crowd.

It was night, a wretched drizzle falling. I had absolutely nothing to do in Berlin. The next train back did not leave till early the next morning, and I might easily have spent the

waiting time at the station. However, I could not remain in public. My features were convulsed and tears kept welling into my eyes. My craving for that one last farewell which would have laid waste to everything was still unassuaged. It was like a craving for a grand cadence such as might shake a great piece of music to the very roots and be strong enough to wrench it right out at last by the heave of that final harmony. But I had been refused that alleviation. And a sort of chromatic distress enclosed me.

It was night, a wretched drizzle falling. It was as smoky on the asphalt outside the station as on the platform, the iron-framed glazing of the station roof like a ball in a string net. The swishing of the wet streets was like soda-water bubbling. Everything was wrapped in the soft fermentation of the rain. As this trip of mine was so utterly unforeseen, I was dressed just as I had run round to the girls' hotel, that is to say, *sans* overcoat, *sans* luggage, *sans* papers of identity. And though they were all polite enough to make the excuse of being full up, every hotel dismissed me the moment they set eyes on me. At last I did find a place where my unsubstantiality was no obstacle. It was an hotel of the lowest kind. Alone at last in my room, I sat myself down sideways on a chair standing by the window. Beside me was a small table. I lay my head on this.

Why do I indicate my posture with such detail? Because that is precisely how I spent the whole night. At rare intervals, as if somebody had touched me, I raised my head and did something to the wall, the broad expanse of which sloped away from me up to the dark ceiling. With unseeing stare I measured it from bottom up as with a rule. Then my sobs would begin again, and once more my face flopped on to my arms.

I have indicated the position of my body with such precision because this had been its position the previous morning on the footboard of that flying train, and it was stamped for ever with that memory. It was the posture of a man staggering back off something lofty which for long had held him and supported him, but in due course had let him go and now was

sweeping noisily past him overhead, to vanish for ever round the corner

At last I stood up I examined the room and opened the window wide. Night had gone, the rain was but a misty dust Impossible to affirm whether still falling, or stopped. I had paid my bill in advance There was not a soul in the hall I announced my departure to nobody

V

What struck me here was merely something which had probably commenced early on, but had all this time been concealed by the closeness of it, and by the unseemliness of a grown man crying.

I was surrounded by objects which had all of them changed Something never before experienced had crept into the substance of reality. Morning knew what I looked like and had come to me precisely in order to be present and *never* leave me. The mist cleared, promising a hot day. Little by little the city came to life. In every direction light wagons, bicycles, lorries and trains slipped past me. Above them, invisible Sultans, were strung out human schemes and aspirations. They steamed and moved with the conciseness of allegories which, even uninterpreted, were familiar. Birds, houses and dogs, trees and horses, tulips and human beings had become shorter and brisker than childhood had known them. The fresh laconic quality of life was revealed to me. It crossed the road, it took me by the hand, it led me along the sidewalk Less than ever before did I deserve the brotherhood of that vast summertime sky. But this was for the moment not mentioned For the time being I was forgiven everything. Some time in the future, somewhere or other, I was to earn the morning's confidence And all about me was dizzily encouraging, like some law by which loans of *that* sort never put one in the red.

Having without any difficulty acquired a ticket, I took my place in the train. I did not have long to wait before it started.

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And there I was once again coasting from Berlin to Marburg, but this time, in distinction from the first, travelling by day, and not only to a life that was already shaped out, but a completely new man I travelled comfortably too, on money taken from V. on loan. And as I went the contours of my room in Marburg floated before me.

Facing me, back to the engine, and smoking, were a man in *pince-nez* which constantly threatened to slip off his nose into the newspaper which he held close up to them, an official of the Department of Forestry, complete with hunting bag slung over one shoulder and a fowling-piece in the rack above. And another. And yet another. They cramped me no more than did my Marburg room, which I saw in thought. The nature of my silence quite hypnotized them. I broke it only at rare intervals, and then merely to confirm what power it had over them. For they understood it. That silence was travelling with me. On the road, I was its travelling-companion and wore its uniform, one they could recognize from their own experience. Otherwise, it goes without saying, they would never have rewarded me with that tacit sympathy for rather treating them courteously than having anything to do with them and rather posing without any pose to the compartment than occupying a seat in it. There was certainly more human-kindness and dog-sense in it than there was tobacco smoke or engine smoke. Ancient towns rushed up to meet us. And I kept seeing the whole layout of my room in Marburg. Now what exactly was the cause of that?

About two weeks before the two sisters had descended on me there had occurred a trifling event which for me at the time was of some importance. I read a paper to both seminars. And with some success, too. Both papers received approval.

I was then advised to develop my propositions in greater detail and offer them again at the end of the Summer Term. And I had agreed to do so, taking up the idea at once and beginning to work with redoubled enthusiasm.

It was however precisely by that fire of mine that an experienced observer would have been able to decide that I was never going to be a scholar. I *lived* the study of science

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more powerfully than the subject as such demands. There was what might be called a vegetative sort of ratiocination in me. Its characteristic was that any secondary idea would proliferate to excess in my reasoning till it began to demand food and attention for itself and when under its influence I turned to books, I did so not from disinterested interest in knowledge, but merely to find literary quotations to support that idea of mine. And although my work was being realized with the aid of logic, imagination, paper and ink, I principally loved it because as it developed on paper it became encrusted with an ever denser ornamentation of quotations and comparisons. And as through lack of time I would at any moment have to give up my quotation-extracting, instead of doing this I began quite simply depositing my authors at the necessary points where I proposed to straighten out my argument, so that in time my thesis became quite concrete, visible from beginning to end to the merest layman as soon as he entered the room. It straggled out across the room like a sort of tree fern, depositing leafy ramifications all over table, couch and window-sill. Any transposition of the books would have amounted to destruction of my whole line of argument, and a complete weekly clean-out of the room would have been equivalent to the destruction by fire of a manuscript of which there was no fair copy. My landlady was under the very strictest of injunctions not to touch a thing, and latterly my room had not once been done out. And when in my imagination, in the train coming home, I saw my room, it was really my philosophy and its probable fate that I was seeing.

VI

When I got back I simply did not recognize Marburg. The mountain had grown. It was higher than before, and the town was thinner, darker.

My landlady opened the door to me. Eyeing me from head to foot, she requested me in such cases in future to inform either her or her daughter in good time. I explained that

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I could not possibly have told her in advance, it was utterly unexpectedly that I had found it so essential to go to Berlin without delay and without first coming back to my lodgings. She rewarded me with an even more sarcastic glance. My speedy reappearance, quite lightly dressed, as if returning from an evening stroll, but stating that I had been to the other side of Germany, did not at all fit in with her conception of life. To her it all seemed most unseemly eccentricity. Still shaking her head, she then handed me a letter and a postcard with the Marburg date-stamp. The letter was from a girl cousin of Petersburg, who happened to be in Frankfort. She was on her way to Switzerland, she said, and would be in Frankfort for three days. One-third of its space occupied by impersonal neat writing, the postcard bore a signature which I knew only too well from university announcements. It was that of Professor Cohen. The message was an invitation to dine with him the very next Sunday.

Between myself and my landlady there now took place in German a conversation which ran more or less as follows:

"What day is it today?"

"Saturday."

"I shall not need any tea. But, in case I forget to tell you later—I have to go to Frankfort tomorrow, please wake me in time for the first train."

"But surely, if I am not mistaken, the Herr Privy Councillor . . ."

"That doesn't matter, I shall be back."

"But you cannot possibly be! The Herr Privy Councillor dines punctually at midday, and you . . ."

But I found something unseemly in such concern for my personal affairs. With an expressive glance at the old lady, I went to my room.

I sat down on my bed, at my wits' end, though for not more than a minute, after which, mastering an upsurge of importuning regret, I went down to the kitchen for a brush and dustpan. I locked my door, took off my jacket, rolled up my shirt-sleeves, and set to work to clean up that gnarled botanical exhibit of mine. Half an hour later my room looked as it had

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when I first saw it. Even the books I had assembled on my fundamental subject did not impinge on its orderliness. Them I tied into four neat parcels, so they would be handy when I happened to be going to the library, and with my foot I tucked them deep away under the bed.

At this moment, my landlady knocked. She had come, time-table in hand, to give me the exact hour of departure of tomorrow's train. When her eyes beheld the change which had taken place she stood transfixed. Then, with a flutter of petticoats, blouse and coiffure, as if there were some spherical sort of plumage which she had sprouted, she floated through the air towards me in a state of quivering excitement. Holding out her hand with wooden gesture, and an expression of triumph, she offered her congratulations on the completion of my thesis. I did not want to disappoint her a second time, so I left her to her noble illusion.

This over, I turned to my toilet. As I dried my face I went out on to the balcony. Evening was falling. Towelling away at my neck, I gazed into the distance, at the road which linked Ockerhausen and Marburg. I found it already impossible to recall what impressions that view had given me on my first evening there. It was the end. The very end. The end of philosophy, that is, the end of all thoughts about it. Like my travelling companions, philosophy would have to reconcile itself to the fact that every real shock is a passage to a new faith.

VII

It is astonishing that I did not return to Russia there and then. The value of Marburg resided in its school of philosophy. I no longer needed that. But now suddenly Marburg proved to have another value.

There is a psychology of creativeness, of the problem of poetics. But of all art this is precisely the origin which is most immediately experienced, and one should not produce guess-work about it.

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We cease to recognize reality. It appears to us in a totally new category, which seems to us as its own state, not ours. Apart from that state, everything in the world has been labelled. Only this is new and unlabelled. We try to give it a name. We get art.

The clearest, most memorable and important feature of art is how it arises, and in their telling of the most varied things, the finest works in the world in fact all tell us of their own birth. It was in this period I am now talking about that I first understood this, in all its broad implications.

Although my declaration of love to V—a and her rejection of me were acts not followed by anything which might have changed my position, they were nevertheless events which in their train brought surprises resembling happiness. I had been desperate, she had tried to console me, and that simple contact between her and myself was such a treasure that with a sudden wave of rejoicing it swept away the clear-cut gall of what I had heard, which was irrevocable. The circumstances of that day were all transformed into a whirl of high-speed movement. It was like an incessant racing into darkness and re-emerging without taking breath. In this way, without once considering what we were at, for the twentieth time that day we found ourselves in the wheel-room of a ship crowded with people, and whence the paddle-wheels of the galley of time were set in motion. It was that very same adult, grown-up world of which I had been so envious when in my childhood the schoolboy loved the schoolgirl and I jealously thought that V—a loved that world.

When I had got back to Marburg I found myself separated not from a young girl whom I had known for six years, but from a woman whom I had only seen for a few moments after her rejection of me. My shoulders and arms no longer belonged to me. As if not mine they kept begging me to let them get at the chains by which a man is fettered to the common cause. And as now I could not think even of her apart from fetters, I loved solely in fetters, loved solely as a prisoner, solely by that cold sweat with which beauty gets rid of its allegiance. Every thought about her at once linked me with that fraternally

choral something that fills the world with a forest of movements established for all time by inspiration and all together is like a battle, like convict labour, like the hell and the high skill of the medieval world. Here I have in mind what children do not know and I shall call a sense of reality.

Early in this *Safe Conduct* I remarked that there are moments when love runs before the sun. What I had in mind was the evidential nature of the emotion, every morning meeting all its surroundings with the incontrovertibility of a report of something for the hundredth time repeated but a moment before. In comparison with this, even the rising of the sun assumed the character of mere town gossip which, however sensational, still demanded verification. In other words, what I had in view was the evidential nature of a form of energy which exceeded the evidential nature of light.

Were I now with my present knowledge, ability and with the time I have at my disposal to think of writing an aesthetic of the creative act, I would base my work on two concepts, the concept of energy and the concept of the symbol. I would show that, in distinction from science, which perceives Nature by means of a section of a column of light, art is interested in life by the projection of a ray of energy through it. I would take the concept *energy* in the same very broad sense in which theoretical physics takes it, the only difference being that here one would not be discussing the principle of energy but its voice or presence. Here I would explain that within the bounds of our consciousness energy is what we call emotion.

When we assume that in *Tristan*, *Romeo and Juliet* and other great works we have the depiction of powerful passion, this is an under-estimation of their content. Their theme is vaster than that, however powerful this one too may be. Their theme is that of energy.

It is indeed from this theme that art is born. Art is more one-sided than people think. It cannot be arbitrarily directed in whatever direction one wills, like a telescope. Applied to a reality integrated by emotion, art is the recording of that integration. It is a direct, factual record of the integration. How can the factual be integrated? Detail gains in brilliance

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what it loses in independence of meaning. Any detail can be replaced by another. Any is precious. Any you care to choose is suitable as evidential deposition about the state which embraces the whole of a transferred reality.

When the symptoms of such a state are transferred to paper, the features of life become those of a creative work and these latter are more striking to us than the former. They are better studied. They have their recognized names. They are known as devices.

Art is realistic as activity, and as fact it is symbolical. It is realistic in that it has not merely conceived a metaphor, but found that metaphor in Nature and with reverence reproduced it. Just as the parts of integrated reality are devoid of meaning in themselves, so is the metaphysical sense too equally devoid of meaning in itself, it is a reference to the general spirit of all art.

Art is also symbolical by all the attractive force of its imagery. Its unique symbol is in the brilliance and the unimperative quality of its images peculiar to it. The mutual interchangeability of images is a symptom of a state in which the parts of reality are mutually indifferent. That indeed is just what art is—mutual interchangeability of images, a symbol of energy.

It is of course really only energy that requires a language of concrete proofs. The other aspects of perception are durable without pointers. They have a direct path to the visual analogies of light to number, precise notion, idea. But energy, the factualness of energy, energy whose duration is limited to the instant of its manifestation, has no other form of expression but the shifting language of symbols. The direct speech of emotion is a double-speech, and there is nothing to take its place.¹

¹ To avoid any misunderstanding, let me point out that I am not speaking of the material content and substance of art, but the sense of its manifestation, its place in life. Individual images by themselves are visual and built on analogy with light. The individual words of art, like all concepts, live by being perceived. But the irreducible, the quoted word of all art, consists in double-speech, it speaks of energy by symbols.

VIII

I went to Frankfort to see my cousin and also to see my family, who about that time came out to Bavaria. My brother paid me a flying visit at Marburg, so did my father. But I noticed nothing of all this. I had seriously taken up writing poetry. Day and night, whenever the moment came, I wrote: of the sea, of daybreak, of southern rain, of a rocky corner of the Harz mountains. On one occasion I was particularly carried away. It was one of those nights which with difficulty feel their way to the nearest wall and droop worn out over the world in a fever of fatigue. Not a breath of air. The only sign of life was the black outline of the sky itself, feebly lolling against the fence. Yes, one other—the powerful scent of the tobacco plants in bloom and the stocks, with which the earth was responding.

With what is the sky not to be compared on such a night! The enormous stars were like a ceremonial banquet, the *Mulky Way* like a great concourse of people. But still more did that chalky smear of diagonally outstretched spaces suggest garden beds by night. Heliotropes and evening stocks. By evening watering laid aslant. Blooms and stars thus brought so close that the sky too might have fallen beneath the rose and now there was no disentangling of stars from that white spattering of flowers.

Carried away, on and on I wrote, a different dust from before now covering my table. That former, philosophical dust was the accumulation of an endless pulverization caused by my anxiety for the wholeness of my dissertation. The present dust I did not whisk away out of sheer solidarity—out of an affection for the flints of the Giessen high road. On the farther edge of the oilcloth that draped my table, long unwashed, a glass from which I had drunk tea gleamed like a star in the heavens.

Suddenly that stupid dissolving away of all my world brought me out in a perspiration and I got up and began to prowls about the room. 'What a dirty trick!' I said to myself. 'Can he

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really be going to cease to be a genius in my eyes? Am I really breaking with him, of all men?' It was already three weeks since that postcard came and for three weeks now I had been shabbily shirking him. I really must explain to him. But—how on earth could I?

And I recalled how sternly pedantic he was. '*Was ist Apperzeption?*' he had asked an examination candidate who was not specializing, and when that student translated that Latin word into German as *durchfassen*, he had snapped. '*Nein, das heisst durchfallen.*'—No, that means you're ploughed.

In his study-groups the classics were read. He would interrupt suddenly and enquire what the author was getting at. One was expected to snap out the leading idea sharply, in one substantive word, military fashion. He would never put up with any vagueness or approximation to the truth, but wanted the truth itself.

On the right-hand side, however, he was a little hard of hearing—precisely the side I chose to defend my essay on Kant from. He let me get well going and forget myself, and when I was least expecting it barked out his usual:

'*Was meint der Alte?*' What has the old man got in mind?

I do not recall exactly what it was on this occasion, but let's say that the correct answer on the multiplication table of ideas was that five fives were—twenty-five. So: 'Twenty-five' said I. There followed a frown and an impatient jerk of his hand, waving my answer aside. I followed with a slight modification of the obvious, but this, too, did not satisfy him, it was far too hesitant. It may easily be imagined that when he started jabbing out at space, appealing to those who knew, variations on my reply were produced at increasing speed. For a time my fellow-students kept to such answers as: *two and a half tens*, or *half a hundred divided in two*. But the increasing clumsiness of those answers merely made him more and more indignant. Yet everybody had seen his scornful reception of my original answer, hence nobody dared venture that again. So, with a *save our souls* sort of gesture, he turned to others, now to get such harum-scarum answers as: *sixty-two*,

ninety-eight and two hundred and fourteen. Waving his arms, it was only with difficulty after this that he subdued the tempestuous motley of wild fancies. Then he turned to me, and in a very quiet, dry voice repeated my original reply—only to be met with a new storm—in my defence!

When at last he did grasp what had happened, he looked me up and down, patted me on the shoulder, and asked where I was from and which term I was in. Then, puffing and knitting his brows, he suggested we proceeded, but still muttering:

'Sehr richtig, sehr richtig. Sie merken wohl? Ja, ja. Ach, ach, der Alte!' And very true, and very true. You do follow, don't you? Yes, yes. Ah, ah, good old Kant!

And much besides this incident I recalled.

Well, and how approach such a man? Whatever was I to say to him?

'Poetry?' he would drawl, 'poetry?' as if to say that he had had quite enough experience of human stupidity and its pitfalls, 'poetry?'

IX

Most likely all this was in June, as the lime trees were still in bloom. Percolating through diamond-fields of waxen conforations as if through burning-glasses, the sun scorched little black spots on the dusty leaves.

Previously to this, too, I had often walked past the drill-ground. But at midday today the dust hung over it like a pile-driving ram and a hollow metallic clatter was to be heard in response. It was the ground on which soldiers were trained, and during drill hours gapers were accustomed to halt opposite—boys with baskets on their shoulders from the cooked-meat stores, and town schoolboys. And, indeed, they had something to see. Scattered over the whole ground, just like cock-birds in bags, spherical dummies were prancing about in pairs, pecking at one another. The soldiers were rigged out in quilted, padded

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jackets and head-pieces of steel net. They were being taught fencing.

The sight was no novelty to me I had seen quite enough of it that summer But on the morning after the night I have described, as I made my way to the town and drew level with the drill-ground, all at once it came back to me—not more than an hour before this I had seen that drill-ground in a dream!

Still without coming to any decision about Cohen, I had gone to bed at sun-up and slept the morning through, and it was just before I awoke that I had this dream of the drill-ground. It was a dream about the coming war, an adequate dream, as a mathematician would put it. And an indispensable one.

It has long since been remarked that however much the training hammered into companies and squadrons may say about wartime, the peacetime mind remains incapable of accomplishing the passage from premise to deduction. Every day pale servicemen in faded uniforms, dusty from top to toe, made their way down below round Marburg, because the streets of the town were far too narrow for them to march through. Yet the most that sight of them could suggest was stationers' shops in which sheets of them were sold, including a pot of glue thrown in with each dozen.

It is another matter in dreams There impressions were never confined to the requirements of routine life. There all the colours moved and reasoned.

I dreamt of a deserted plain, and something told me it was Marburg besieged. Past me, in Indian file, pushing barrows, moved pale, lanky Nettelbecks. It was one of the darkness hours of a day quite different from any usual on this earth. The dream was in a Frederick the Great style, with entrenchments and earthworks. On the battery heights, scarcely distinguishable, were the outlines of men with spy-glasses. With physical palpability they were wrapped in a silence such as there never is on earth. It pulsed in mid-air, a shifting, earthy blizzard of silence, not merely there, but there in a soundlessness whose being was tangible. As if constantly

shovelled in from some unknown source. It was the most grief-laden dream I had ever had. I am sure I cried in my sleep.

The episode with V—a had established itself deep within me. I had a healthy heart. It functioned well. Working at night, it gathered up the most fortuitous, most scattered impressions of the day. Now it had stuck its finger into the drill-ground, and that one little impulse was sufficient to reveal the mechanism of it in motion, and as it turned on its axis the dream hammered out softly:

'I am a dream about war.'

I do not know what it was that I had set out to Marburg for, but I certainly had such a load on my soul that my head might easily have been packed with soil for some fortification purpose.

It was the hour of the midday meal. At such a time of day I could find none of my university friends. The seminary library was empty. On the lower side it was adjoined by private dwellings. The heat was insufferable. Here and there drowning men surfaced at open windows, their chewed-up collars flapping free. Behind them there floated to the surface women martyrs in loose blouses simmering on their bodies as if in the laundress's copper.

I turned to go home, and decided to take the upper road, where the castle ramparts sheltered many a shade-enwrapped villa. Their gardens lay prone in the heat of a forge. Alone the stems of the roses, fresh, it seemed, from the anvil, were awake, drooping in preening pride towards slow, blue-licking flames. My dream was of a certain narrow alley which plunged steeply down the hill behind such a villa. There, shade was to be found. I was sure of it. So I decided to turn down that way, and get a breath of fresh air. It may be imagined how utterly flabbergasted I was when from out of the same state of stupefaction as that in which I proposed to take my ease in that alley, what did I behold but—Professor Hermann Cohen! He had noticed me. Retreat was cut off.

My son is seven. When, without understanding a French sentence, he merely guesses the sense from the context in

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which it occurs, he says: 'I didn't understand from the words, but because.' And full-stop! Not *because* of this or that, just *because*—*I understood because*.

I will now make use of his terminology to call the brain by which people *get there*, in distinction from the brain with which they merely take constitutional strolls, *the because brain*. Well, Cohen had that sort of *because brain*. It was rather terrifying to have a conversation with him, and so it was joke at all to take this stroll. Leaning heavily on a stick the matter-of-fact spirit of mathematical physics would move forward at one's side, with many a halt, and more or less in harmony with that forward motion would step by step assemble his principal pyramid. That university professor in loose coat and soft hat was to a high degree packed with the precious essence bottled in past ages by the heads of the Galileos, the Newtons, the Leibnitzes, the Pascals.

He did not like to talk while walking, but would merely listen to his companion's chatter, which by reason of the terraced nature of the sidewalks of Marburg could never flow evenly. He would plod on, listening, then suddenly stop short to utter some biting comment on what he had just heard, after which, digging his stick in against paving stones and pushing himself off again, he would continue his progress till the next aphoristic breather.

Such was the shape of our conversation now. By referring to my defection I merely made it so much the worse. This he gave me to understand in murderous fashion without a single word, merely by adding to his scornful silence by the way he thrust his stick against the stones. He expressed interest in my plans. He did not approve. In his opinion I should have stayed at Marburg till I had taken my doctorate, only returning home after that to pass the Russian state examination, all this with a view to a possible return to the West, eventually to make my career there.

I thanked him most warmly for this hospitable thought, but he read much less into my gratitude than into my attraction to Moscow. By the way I presented this he quite rightly sensed an element of deception and illogicality, which

offended him, for with life so short he could not stand any sort of conundrum that artificially shortened it still further. Thus it was while restraining his indignation that he moved slowly down the hill, from one step to another, wondering if after such obvious, wearisome twaddle the fellow would at last say something to the point.

But however could I tell him that I was giving up philosophy for ever, and never even contemplated coming to Marburg again? How tell that to this man who, when the time came for him to take his pension, spoke of loyalty to great philosophy in his farewell lecture in such terms that on the benches, which included many young girl students, there was much stir of handkerchiefs

X

At the beginning of August our parents went on to Italy from Bavaria and invited me to Pisa. My funds were running out. I had hardly enough for the journey back to Moscow. One of those evenings, many of which I then envisaged before me, I was sitting on our ancient café terrace in the company of G——v and lamenting to him about the sorry state of my finances. He then went into the matter thoroughly. He had more than once had to live very poorly indeed, and it had been precisely in those periods that he had wandered about the world, a great deal, too. He had lived some time both in England and in Italy and knew ways by which a man could keep himself on the road on almost nothing. His plan was for me to go to Venice and Florence on the money I had left, then on to join my parents, feed myself up again and also get a new contribution for my journey home, for which, if in miserly enough fashion I eked out what I had left, there might be no need. He began jotting down figures, and they certainly did not add up to a great sum.

The head waiter of the café was the friend of us all. He knew the secret thoughts of every one of us. When I was at the peak of my trials and my brother suddenly descended

on me, hindering me in my work the whole day long, that queer fellow made the discovery that A. possessed a rare gift for billiards, and by reason of this stirred up such a passion for the game in him that from early morning on my brother was in attendance at the café, anxious to perfect himself, but thus leaving the lodgings in my full possession all day.

The head waiter now took the liveliest interest in our discussion of the Italian plan. Whisking away somewhere else every other minute, he reappeared on one occasion to tap G——v's estimate with his pencil, and find that even this was not sparing enough. Another time, he returned with a fat railway guide under his arm. Planting on the table a tray with three bottles of strawberry punch, he took the time-table and flicked the pages over twice from cover to cover. Then, having found the table he wanted, he announced suddenly that I was to leave that very night, by fast train, it left at so many minutes after three, and to seal this he proposed we should drain a glass to my journey.

I did not hesitate long. 'But of course!' I cried to myself, as I followed his arguments. I had my discharge from the university. I had paid all my dues and held the receipts. It was only half past ten. There would not be much harm in waking my landlady. I could be packed in a jiffy. Decided and signed up. I was going.

My old friend was as delighted as if he himself were scheduled to go to Basel the next day.

"You listen to me," he said, smacking his lips as he gathered together the empty glasses. "Let's take a good look into each other's eyes, it's an old German custom. It may come in useful. One never knows what's coming to one."

In answer I gave a laugh and assured him that this was not at all necessary, I had already done so, long since, and would never forget him. We bade each other farewell. I followed G——v out, and the soft chinking of nickel-plate died away behind us, as I then thought, for ever.

A few hours later, having talked ourselves senseless and walked that little town till we were silly, for one did not need long to exhaust its stock of streets, G——v and I went

down the hill to the hamlet adjoining the station. We were surrounded by fog. Motionless, we stood still in it just like cattle at a watering and smoked stubbornly away with that dull wordless concentration which is the best way of putting cigarettes out. Gradually, daylight began to glimmer. The dew wrapped the kitchen-gardens in gooseflesh. Out of the fog broke beds of satined young plants. All at once, at this point in the dawn, the whole town suddenly stood outlined towering above us. Everybody was asleep. There stood the churches, the castle, the university. But like a tuft of cobweb on a wet mop they still merged into the grey sky. I even had the impression that just as the town appeared it began to vaporize away again, like breath broken off half a pace from a window pane.

"Well, now for it!" said G——v

Day was definitely breaking. We strode rapidly down the stone platform. Into our faces out of the fog like stones flew fragments of an approaching roll of thunder. And then, swift-winged, there was the train at our feet. My comrade and I embraced, I slung my suitcase aboard and leapt on to the footboard. With one cry, the flints of concrete rolled on. The door was slammed to, and I pressed my face to the window. In a sweeping curve the train sliced away all I had gone through in that place and before I expected it the Lahn, the railroad crossing, the high road and the house where I had lived had all flashed by. I tore at the window, but it would not come down, then, suddenly, with a bang, it did so all by itself. I stuck my head out as far as I could. The coach was cornering rapidly, I could see nothing at all. Farewell, philosophy, farewell youth, farewell Germany!

XI

Six years had passed. When all had been forgotten. When the war had dragged on and ended at last and the revolution had swept us through. Then, over the snow, out of the darkness, into the low-pitched *mezzanin* dusk, timeless, a telephone

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call crept up to the house where I was living and rang out in my flat.

"Who is speaking?" I enquired.

"G——v," came the answer.

It was so astounding that I was not even surprised.

"But wherever are you?"

Equally outside time, I squeezed those words out of myself.

He replied. Another startling surprise. He was next door to us, just across the yard!

He had rung up from the nearby inn, now turned into communal sleeping quarters for the People's Commissariat of Education. A minute later I was sitting beside him. His wife had not changed a bit. The children I had not known before.

Now, here is what was so unexpected! It transpired that he had spent all these years on this earth just like everybody else, and although living abroad had been equally submerged by that grim war for the liberation of small nations. I learned that he had recently come from London. And either was a Party member or a hot Party supporter. A Soviet official. Transferred when the Government moved to Moscow to the appropriate section of the Education Commissariat apparatus. Hence now my neighbour. And—that was all!

But I had rushed round to see the fellow-Marburgian in him! Of course, not to try with his assistance to resume life, this time perhaps rather more cautiously—without a war, if possible—where we left off that distant foggy dawn, standing mist-shrouded like cattle at their watering. Oh, not for that purpose, of course. But though I knew in advance that such a renewal was unthinkable, I had certainly hurried round there to find out for what reasons in my life it was unthinkable.

Later, I was to have the good fortune to meet G——v again in Marburg itself. I spent two days there with him in February, 1923. I was visiting the old city together with my wife, never thinking how it would bring them together. In this I did them both a wrong. Yet, I too, had a bad time. I had seen the Germany of before the war, and now saw the after-war Germany. It was to behold everything that had happened

to the world foreshortened to the extreme. Those were the days of the Ruhr occupation. Germany was hungry and cold, under no illusions, creating no illusions, her hand held out to the age as if for charity (a gesture not at all like her), the whole country on crutches

To my surprise, I found my landlady still living. When she and her daughter saw me they threw their arms up wildly. Both when I called were seated exactly where they used to sit eleven years previously, at their sewing. Their room was still to let. Would I care to see it? I would not have recognized it, had it not been for the road from Ockershausen. That was visible exactly as it used to be. But the dishevelled face of that vacant, chilly room and the bare willows on the skyline—all that was strange to me. That landscape which once upon a time had brooded too much over the Thirty Years' War had ended in forecasting it into reality for itself. As I left the town, I called at a cake shop and sent the two women a huge nut cake.

And now about Cohen. . . . Cohen I was unable to see. Cohen was dead.

XII

So, to resume—it was station after station after station. Stations like fluttering stone butterflies whisking along in the wake of the train.

At Basel I found a sabbath silence, such that one could hear the swallows weaving about the eaves with their swift wings. Like eyeballs, flaming walls folded back beneath overhanging eaves of morello tile. The whole town was winking and blinking those eyelashes, and the brittle gold of the primitives in the clean, cool museum glowed with the same potter's conflagration as the Virginia creeper on the suburban villas.

Zwei francs vierzig centimes with amazing clarity of pronounciation said the peasant-girl in the costume of her canton in the shop. Though this was not exactly the watershed of the

two linguistic basins—that was over to the right, beyond that overhanging roof, yes, to the south of it, in the blazing, far-flung federal azure, ever higher up the mountains. Somewhere, I was told, just below St Gotthard.

To think that, worn-out by the night vigils involved by a forty-eight hours' journey, I had slept through such a place! The one night of my life when I should not have slept—almost a case of '*Simon, sleepest thou?*' May I be forgiven! And yet there were moments when, standing at the window, I did waken for shamefully brief minutes. '*For their eyes were heavy.* . . .' And when I did. . . .

. . . around me rose the hubbub of a peace conference of motionless summits crowding in on us. Oh! So, while I drowsed and uttering shriek after shriek with our whistle we willed and drilled our way from one tunnel into another, we had been overtaken by breathing a good three thousand metres superior to our own, had we? The darkness was never so impenetrable, but that echoing filled it all with its convex plasticity of sound. Unashamed and unhindered conversed those thunderous abysses as godparentlike they put the world through its ordeals. Everywhere, everywhere, everywhere the mountain streams wrangled and intrigued and gurgled their waters away. It was easy to guess how they were pinned around the steepes, as drawn threads dangling down to the vale beneath. While down from the heights the o'erhanging crags came bounding at the train, to cluster on the carriage roofs, there wildly chattering, dangling banging feet against coach walls as they revelled in their stowaway ride.

But sleep began to master me, and I sank into an unpardonable drowsiness on the threshold of the snows, above me the Oedipean white horses of the Alps, the acme of demoniacal perfection of a planet. On the summit of that kiss which, like Michael Angelo's *Night*, Mother Earth here plants on her own shoulder.

When I woke up, a pellucid Alpine morning was peeping in at the window. Some obstacle, a landslide, had halted the train. We were requested to walk to a relief beyond. We set off along the alpine railway track. Its ribbon wound from one

panorama to another. It was as if the line was constantly being tucked away around the corner, like stolen goods. My luggage was carried by a barefoot Italian lad the very image of a chocolate wrapping. Somewhere at hand his flock was making music. The jangle of sheep-bells floated down as they swished into vocal focus and swayed away again. Horse-flies sucked at that symphony, its pelt twitching. Saw-wort scented the air and never for a moment did the perpetual pouring of unseen waters from nowhere into nowhere cease.

The price of my wakeful efforts was soon to be seen. I spent half a day in Milan and have remembered nothing of it. Only the cathedral, for ever new as I made my way across the city towards it, changing its appearance at every street intersection at which it revealed itself, to leave me with an utterly imprecise impression. Again and again it reared up, a melting glacier against the azure precipices of August's stifling heat. One felt it was feeding all the countless cafés of Milan with water and ice. When, at long last, a miniature *piazza* cast me up at its feet and I cocked back my head, it came tumbling down straight into me, nave and rustling columns and turrets together, just like a plug of snow thrusting down the crooked pipe of a spring gutter.

But by now I could scarcely stand, and the first thing I promised myself when I reached Venice was a really good sleep.

XIII

When I emerged from the station building, with its provincial façade in a customs and excise style, a sort of fluency softly slipped up to me somewhere below my feet. Something ominously dingy, like water from a kitchen sink, yet touched with the glitter of two or three stars. Almost imperceptibly ebbing and rising again, it was like an age-blackened painting in a fluctuating frame. It was not immediately that I grasped that this depiction of Venice was Venice itself. That I really was in Venice, it was no dream.

The station arm of that blind gut vanished round the corner, towards further marvels of this water-borne gallery on a sewer. I hurried to the embarkation place of the cheap little steamers which there take the place of trams.

The *vaporetto* perspired and panted, choking and wiping its nose, while on the same unruffled mirror of water in which it dragged its dipping whiskers, one by one withdrawing from us, the mansions of the Grand Canal floated in a hemisphere about us. Mansions they are called, but they might well be called palaces, although words do not exist which could give an idea of those rugs of flowering marble dipping steeply into the nocturnal lagoon, as into the arena of a medieval tournament.

There exists a special christmas-tree Orient, the Orient of the Pre-Raphaelites. There is a concept of starry night as in the legend of the Magi. There is a time-honoured Christmas relief: the surface of a gilded walnut flecked with pale-blue paraffin-wax. There are such words as *khalva* [oriental sweetmeat of crushed sesame seeds and honey] and *khaldea* [Chaldaea], *magi* [The Wise Men] and *magnij* [magnesium], *India* and *indigo*. To them might well be added the colourfulness of nocturnal Venice and its water reflections.

As if on purpose to establish the Russian ear's walnut scale as definitely as possible, for the information of passengers as the *vaporetto* came in, first to one bank, then the other, there were cries of: *Fondaco dei Turchi! Fondaco dei Tedeschi!* Of course, it goes without saying, the names of the wards of Venice had nothing whatever to do with Russian *funduks* [filberts], but enshrined memory of the *caravanserais* formerly established there by Turkish and German traders.

I do not recall outside which Vendramin or Grimani, Cornero or Foscari or Loredan mansion I saw my first gondola—or the first that struck me. But it was certainly beyond the Rialto. Without a sound the boat entered the Grand Canal from a side alley, cut straight across it, and proceeded to berth at the nearest palace approach. As if passed in one motion from yard to front door on the rounded belly of a slowly turning wave, leaving behind it a sombre gully full of dead

rats and dancing crescents of chewed-out water-melon. Before it, scattered and fugitive, stretched the lunar desert of the broad main water highway. Huge, in a feminine way, as everything is huge that is perfect in form and surpasses any mere measurements of the volume the body occupies in space. Its bright, comb-like halberd lightly flew across the sky, high borne on that rounded occiput of wave, and with like airiness the dark silhouette of the gondolier bounded across the stars, while the tiny bonnet of the cabin was lost below, as if squeezed into the water in the saddle twixt stern and prow.

Even before I came I had come to the conclusion from all G——v's stories of Venice that my best course would be to find a lodging in the district adjoining the Academy. So here it was that I disembarked. I do not recall if I crossed over the bridge, or stayed on the right bank. I do recall a miniature square, surrounded by palaces similar to those on the *Grand Canal*, except that they were greyer and sterner. And rested on *terra firma*.

In the moon-washed square people were standing, people were strolling about, people were sprawling. Not many of them. They just seemed to be there to drape it in forms ranging from mobile through semi-mobile to the completely immobile. One pair struck me particularly. They never once glanced at each other, but, seeming to revel each in the other's response of silence, gazed intently over at the far bank of the Canal. No doubt servants of the *palazzo* taking their rest. It was the calm stance of the man-servant that first attracted me, his short-cut grizzled hair, the grey colour of his tunic. It breathed the north. Then I caught sight of his face. It struck me that I had seen it somewhere before, though I could not recall where. I approached him with my suitcase and in a non-existent dialect forged in my mind after sometime attempts to read Dante in the original, put before him my anxiety to find a resting-place. He heard me out with courtesy, thought for a moment, then put a question to the housemaid at his side. She shook her head. Taking out a watch, he snicked the cover open, glanced at the time, clicked it to again, thrust it back into his waistcoat, all without emerging from his pensive

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state. Then, with a nod of his head he invited me to follow him. We turned the corner of the building, from moon-washed façade to utter murk.

We followed down a stone alley no wider than the corridor in an ordinary house. From time to time it took us up over short hunchbacked stone bridges. Then on both sides dirty sleeves of the lagoon reached across, the water in them so cramped that it seemed like a rolled-up Persian rug with difficulty stuffed into a cock-eyed packing-case.

We were met as we went by a number of people coming over those humped flagstones. Long before she appeared, every Venetian woman announced her approach by the quick clicking of her heelless slippers on the stone setts.

High above us, bridging those black as pitch crannies down which we wove our path, the night sky gleamed, ever receding into unknown places. As if down the whole Milky Way thistle-down was blown and it was only to let column after column of that on-pressing light pass that from time to time the alleys widened out into intersections and squares. Meanwhile, ever marvelling at the strange familiarity of my companion, I continued to talk to him in that non-existent dialect, plunging from tarriness to down, from down back to the tar, as with his assistance I sought the cheapest lodging I could find.

But on the embankments, where one came out on to the broad waters of the Canal, other colours reigned and hubbub took the place of quiet. *Vaporettos* were continually coming in and going out again, bearing with them crowds of people, and the oily-black water churned snowy up like broken marble crushed in the mortars of those engines now thrashing madly, now suddenly stilled. And nearby to that frothing sound the flares hissed bright in the fruit-sellers' booths and tongues were busy as the fruits themselves jostled and danced in mad columns of parcooked fruit salads.

In the scullery of a restaurant on the shore we were given a useful hint. The address indicated, however, took us back to the beginning of our wanderings. As we made our way thither we traversed the whole of our route in backwards order, so that when my guide at last established me in one of the

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albergos near the *Campo Morosini*, I had the feeling that I had just covered the equivalent of the whole of Venice's starry sky, going now against its own line of movement. Had I then been asked what sort of a place Venice was . . . 'Bright nights,' I would have said, 'miniature squares and peaceable folk who all seem strangely familiar.'

XIV

"Right you are, sir!" yelled the proprietor at me, as if I were deaf—he was a sturdy veteran, wearing a grubby shirt, unbuttoned at the throat, and in his sixties. "I'll fix you, my dear fellow! As if you were my own flesh and blood!"

His countenance flushed as he eyed me askance, sizing me up, tucking enormous thumbs under his braces, and drumming with his fingers on his hairy chest.

"Like a bit o' cold veal roast?" he demanded, still eyeing me just as fiercely, but without making any deduction from my reply.

I suppose that despite all his pains to appear terrible, with those monstrous Radetzki moustaches, he was really very kind-hearted. He could recall Austrian rule, and, as I was soon to discover, could talk a little German. But as his conception of that language was more or less that of Dalmatian sergeant-majors, my glib pronunciation prompted in him gloomy reflections on the decline of the language since he was a soldier. Apart from that, he probably had heartburn.

He now raised himself from behind the bar rather as if standing in his stirrups, shouted something unintelligible to an unknown destination, then springily descended to the little courtyard, where we got to know one another better. The yard contained a few small tables with dirty white cloths.

"I took a liking to you the moment you came in," he ground out, with ominous pleasure, and with a gesture inviting me to sit down, sank to a chair himself, two or three tables away.

Beer and meat were brought. The yard was their dining-room. The patrons of the inn, if there were any, had no doubt

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long since supped and climbed to roost, and only in the far corner of this gustatory arena one miserable little old man still sat on, serving as approving chorus to the proprietor whenever the latter turned to him

As I wolfed that veal I suddenly began to be puzzled by the strange way its bright pink slices kept fading out and reappearing. Clearly I was dropping off to sleep I could scarcely keep my eyes open.

All at once, as in a fairy-tale, there by my side was a delightful wizened little old lady. Laconically, the proprietor put her *au fait* with his passionate liking for me. After that, they both vanished up a narrow staircase. I was left alone. I felt my way up to my own bed, without another thought about anything to slip my clothes off in the darkness.

After ten hours of sound, unhesitant sleep by direct coach, I wakened to a dazzling sunshiny morning. The unbelievable proved to be true. I was in Venice. The flecks of dancing light which clustered in a bright pattern on the ceiling as if I were in the cabin of a river steamer were eloquent of this, and also told me that I was going to get up without a moment's delay and rush out to see it all

I examined the room in which I lay. On nails hammered into a painted partition hung petticoats and blouses, a feather brush on a ring and a carpet-beater, which was hooked on a nail by its own plaited basketwork. The window-sill was piled with tins of pomade, and in a *bon-bon* box was some rough chalk.

From the other side of a curtain, strung the whole breadth of the attic, came the tapping and swishing of shoe brushes. I had been hearing it for some time. No doubt all the shoes of the *albergo* being cleaned. Mingling with this sound came a feminine rustling and the whisper of a child. In the rustling woman I recognized the old lady of last night. She was a distant relation of the proprietor's and kept house for him. He had let me have her wretched little room, but when I tried somehow to put that right she most agitatedly begged me not to meddle in their domestic affairs.

Stretching, before I dressed, I looked about me once again,

when all at once a fleeting gift of perspicacity made all the circumstances of the previous day perfectly clear. My last night's guide had reminded me of the chief waiter of Marburg, the very one who had hoped he might yet again be of service to me. No doubt the force of purpose that he put into that request of his served to augment what likeness there really was. This was why I had shown that preference for one person above all others in the square.

There was nothing to surprise one in this. Our most innocent 'good evening' and 'good-bye' would be meaningless were not time strung with the unity of the events of life, that is, by the interlocking action of the hypnosis of our daily round.

XV

And so this good fortune came to me too, and I had the happiness of learning that it is just as possible day after day to have *rendezvous* with a fragment of built-up space as with a living person.

From whatever side one approached the *piazza*, at every entry there lurked in waiting for one that moment when one's breath was quickened, one's step speeded up, when one's feet without effort carried one on of themselves. Whether from the *Merceria* side or that of the telegraph building, there is that instant in which the path one has taken turns into a vestibule beyond which the very atmosphere parts from itself, in one gesture to spread forth its own version of that broadly-limned open-skied square and as if at a reception without delay brings forward campanile and Church of St Mark, Doges' Palace and three façaded colonnade.

As you gradually become attached to them, you incline to the impression that Venice is a city inhabited by buildings. The four I have mentioned and still more like them. In this assertion there is no figure of speech. The statement here made in stone by the architects is so lofty that no rhetoric can attain its height. Apart from this, there is the barnacle-like incrustation of centuries of travellers' enthusiasm. That accumulating

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rapture has squeezed out of Venice the last hint of the declamatory. There is no room left, not a palace unoccupied. Every corner is packed full with beauty

When, about to enter the gondola they have taken to go to the station, English people linger for the last time on the *piazzetta*, in postures which would be natural were they bidding living people farewell, you are the more jealous of them in their love for those buildings since, as everybody knows, no European culture ever came so close to Italy as that of England

XVI

One day, beneath these same ceremonial flagstaffs, plaiting their generations as if they were thread of gold, crowded three mutually interlocked centuries, while not far from the square, a motionless forest of vessels, the fleet of those centuries slumbered. As if continuing the plan of the town. Rigging thrust from attic, galleys kept watch, and there was equal activity on dry land and on board. Sidelong to the street, in the moonlit night, three-deckers fettered the land with the dead menace of their immobile immutable pressure. In like funereal grandeur stood the anchored frigates, and from the ride admired the quietest and deepest halls.

For those times it was a very powerful fleet, conquering by sheer numbers. As early as the fifteenth century it included three and a half thousand merchant ships alone, not counting the military, all manned by seventy thousand sailors and shipbuilders. A fleet that was Venice's reality, no invention, but the prosaic under-foundation of the legend. As paradox one could say: this pitching and tossing tonnage was the city's *terra firma*, its real dry ground. Also its commercial background and its prison underground. In that knotted cordage the imprisoned air was grim. The fleet wore men down, oppressed men. But as if from the twin part of a double vessel, from the shore, balancing that naval pressure, rose something in response which redeemed. To grasp this is to grasp how art deceives the man who commissions it.

The origin of the Russian word for trousers, *pantalony*, is intriguing. There was a time, before they attained their present meaning, when the sounds indicated one of the stock figures of Italian farces. But still earlier, in its original sense, *pianta leone* represented the idea of Venetian victoriousness and signified, companion of the lion (on the arms), i.e., in other words: *Venice the conqueror*. Byron even mentions this in *Childe Harold*.

"Her very byword sprung from victory,
The planter of the Lion, which through fire
And blood she bore o'er subject earth and sea."

The way ideas become transformed is indeed remarkable. When people grow accustomed to horrors, they can become the foundations of good taste. Will we ever understand that the guillotine could in time become the model of a lady's brooch?

The lion symbol played a varied role in Venice. For instance, the slot through which secret denunciations could be dropped on the staircase leading to the Censors was modelled in the shape of a lion's jaws, and stood side by side with paintings by Veronese and Tintoretto. And we know what terror that *bocca di leone* inspired in men of the time, and how, when the authorities failed to express their disapproval of this, it gradually became a sign of bad manners to mention persons who had mysteriously slipped through that beautifully modelled slot.

When art erected palaces for the enslavers, it was trusted. Men thought it shared the common view and would also share the common fate in the future. But that is just what did not happen. The language of the palaces proved to be a language of oblivion, and not in the least the *pianta leone* language they thought it would be. Pantaloon aims, they had crumbled to nothing. But the palaces remained.

The painting of Venice has also remained. I had been familiar with the taste of its glowing springs from reproductions and the exported overflow, in museums, since childhood. But one had to come to their original home, a different thing from seeing

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isolated pictures, to see that art in its entirety as a golden swamp, bubbling as one trod it, as a special language, as one of the primal mill-pools of creation.

XVII

I observed that wonderful sight more profoundly and more diffusely than my account of it will now suggest. But I made no effort to realize what I saw in the sense in which I interpret it today. In the course of years however, my impressions became shaped into appropriate form, and in my concise conclusions I have not departed one single step from the truth.

I observed what sort of observation first masters the artistic instinct. How it is first acquired, in which form it becomes visible, when people begin to see it. Once she is noticed, Nature, as obedient space, yields to narration, and it is in this condition of drowsiness that she is gently transferred to canvas. One has to see Carpaccio and Bellini to understand what representation means.

Further, I learned what syncretism accompanies the development of high technique, when, with the attainment of identity between artist and his raw material, it becomes impossible to say which of the three—or to whose advantage—proves the most active element on the canvas—the executant, the execution or the object executed. One has to see Veronese and Titian to understand what art is.

Finally, if I did not value these impressions sufficiently at the time, I did find out how little talent one needs to explore.

Who will credit it? The triumph of what is depicted, the triumph of the depicter and the object depicted, or, more broadly: the shift in the co-ordinates of energy of objectivity—that is what rouses his passion. It is like a slap in the face of mankind, delivered through his agency. Into his canvases there enters a hurricane which by the defining blows of its passion purges the creative chaos. One needs to see the Michael Angelo of Venice, Tintoretto, to understand what a genius, that is to say, an artist is

XVIII

However, in those days I did not enter into these fine points. Then, in Venice, and still more powerfully in Florence—or, to be finally accurate, in the winters immediately following, in Moscow—it was other thoughts, more distant and more particular, which came into my head.

The principal thing that everybody bears away from a meeting with Italian art is a sense of the palpable unity of our culture, in whatever he may see this and whatever he may call it.

What a lot, for instance, has been said about the paganism of the humanists, and in what varied ways, as of a current both proper and improper. Quite true, the clash of the belief in resurrection with the age of the renaissance is a phenomenon all of its own, one which is central and unique in European history. And who has not noticed the anachronism, often immoral, in the treatment of the canon themes of those *Presentations of the Virgin*, *Ascensions*, *Marriages in Cana*, and *Last Suppers*, with all their over-lavish world pomp and circumstance?

But it was precisely in that lack of harmony that I came to see the thousand-year-old uniqueness of our culture.

Italy crystallized for me that by which we unconsciously breathe from the cradle. Her art completed in me a process of thought which by her prompting I had to complete for myself, and while for days I went round from collection to collection, it tossed ready-made at my feet the observation which had finally distilled from the paint itself.

I grasped, for instance, that the Bible is not so much a book with a fixed text as a day-book full of jottings for mankind. And I grasped that all that is eternal is so. That it is vital not when obligatory, but when it is applicable to all possible forms and the centuries following, after it can take their models from it. I grasped that the history of culture is a chain of equations drawn in images, all linking together in pairs, one after the other, the unknown and the known—the

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known, constant for the whole series, being a legend built into the foundations of tradition, while on the other hand, new every time, the unknown is the moment of current culture in which one is living.

That is what engaged my attention then, that is what I began to understand and to love.

I loved the living essence of historical symbolism, in other words, that instinct by which, like house swallows, we have created our world—a huge nest, stuck together from earth and sky, life and death, and two times, time present and time absent. I came to understand that it is the force of adhesion that prevents its falling apart, a force which consists in the transparent image-quality of all its parts.

I was however young and I did not know that this does not include the fate of the genius or his nature. I did not know that his substance resides in the experience of concrete biography, and not in a system of symbols, broken into separate images. I did not know that in distinction from the primitives the roots of a genius lie in the crude immediacy of the moral sense. One of his characteristics is remarkable. Though all explosions of moral indignation develop their play within a culture, it always seems to the rebel that his revolt comes into play in public, beyond the garden fence. I did not know that the most lasting images are composed by the iconoclast in those rare cases when he is not born empty-handed.

When Pope Julius the Second expressed his displeasure regarding the poverty of colouring of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, what, to justify himself regarding that ceiling with its depiction of the creation of the world with the appropriate figures, Michael Angelo replied was:

'In those times gold was not worn. The personages depicted were poor.'

There you have a youthful, thunder-like language of the sort of which I speak.

The contours of culture are attained by the man who conceals in himself a tamed Savonarola. An untamed Savonarola destroys it.

XIX

The evening before I left there was one of those concerts with fireworks in the *Piazza San Marco* which are often given there. The façades of the buildings which enclose the square were clothed from top to bottom with points of light. Round three sides glowed a black and white transparency. The outdoor audience was drenched in a bathhouse froth of brilliance, as if in a magnificently illuminated ballroom. All at once a fictitious ceiling began gently sprinkling it, as if the assembled audience was really a seminal square of the far north. Scarcely had a shower of another sort begun than it suddenly ceased. With a rocket of red marble a firework glow lapped the *campanile* about with the fire of a rose-hued mist enwrapping it half-way to the ground. A little beyond this were whorls of dark purple vapour wreathing about the five-headed contours of St Mark's till it was like a fairy-tale scene. That end of the *piazza* might indeed have been an undersea realm. But above the porch reared a harness of four fine horses, hot leaping hither from Ancient Greece, here to halt their onward rush, pawing at the ground, as on the brink of a precipice.

When the concert was over, the even murmur of a millstone of many footsteps became audible. Till now the music had muffled it, but it had been there in the arcades all the time, a living encirclement of strollers whose shuffling feet all blended into one, like the scrape and rustle of countless skates round the icy basin of a skating rink. And through this throng, speedy and spiteful, weaved the women, menacing rather than emanating seduction. As they walked they kept glancing over their shoulders, seemingly anxious to thrust all from them and destroy as, suddenly, with enticingly undulating bodies, they slipped away into doorways. And if one of them did turn round and eye you, all you saw fixed on you was the deadly mascaraed mask of a black Venetian kerchief. This rapid gait of theirs, *allegro irato*, was a strange response to the black vibrancy of the firework display between the white furrows of flaming diamonds.

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Twice in poetry have I essayed to express the sensation I shall always feel in connection with Venice. The night before I left, I was awakened in my *albergo* by a guitar *arpeggio* which there and then broke off. I rushed to the window, above the lapping waters, to peer out into the depths of the night sky, as if there I might find some trace of that sound so suddenly silenced. To judge from my appearance, any stranger would have said that but half awake I was investigating whether over Venice had not appeared some new constellation vaguely conceived of as *The Constellation of The Guntar*.

PART THREE

I

BEYOND the double valance of blackening trees the chain of boulevards, winter after winter, sliced Moscow through. Starred slices of lemon gleamed the yellow lights in the houses. Down to the tree-tops dangled the sky. All that was white about me was deep blue.

Along these boulevards, stooping like charging goats, young men scurried, poorly dressed. Some were acquaintances of mine. But the majority I did not know. Yet all together were my generation, countless aspects of my own childhood.

It was not long since they had reached that stage when they were no longer just Christian names. Now there was a handle to those appellations, a patronymic, and with this promotion had come the conceding of rights. An initiation to the secret of words like: *to master, to exploit, to adopt*. The readiness they evinced was worthy of more attentive choice.

In the world we have death and foresight Ignorance is dear to us What we know in advance is terrible. Every passion is a blind side-stepping from something coming at us, seeming inevitable. If the passions had nowhere to side-step to off that common road along which common time unfolds (and the time of the gradual destruction of the universe is such), living species would have nowhere to exist and repeat themselves

Yet life has where to live and passion where to side-step, because side by side with common time there is the never-ceasing endlessness of wayside systems which in their reproduction are immortal, and every new generation is one of these.

Hunching their shoulders as they scurried on, the young folk speeded through the blizzard, and although each one of them had his reasons for hurrying, what spurred them on more than personal promptings was something common to them all, and this was their historical purposiveness, that is, the toll paid by them to that passion with which, for the *n*-th time avoiding its end, and trying to escape from the common road, mankind had now taken refuge in them.

And, to conceal from them the duplicity of flight through the unknown, so they should not go mad, give up the thing they had begun and hang themselves throughout the world, behind those trees along all the boulevards lurked a force which was frightfully ancient and experienced, and this kept watch over them with eyes that were wise. Behind those trees stood art, so marvellously understanding of us that one must ever wonder from what non-historical worlds it has brought that ability it has of seeing history in outline. There it was behind the trees, terribly like life, there tolerated by reason of that resemblance, as the portraits of wives and mothers are tolerated in the laboratories of scholars dedicated to natural science, that is, to the gradual solution of death.

What sort of art was this? It was the young art of Scriabin, Blok, Komissarzhevskaya, Byely—advanced, stirring, original art. And it was so amazing, that not only did it not prompt any thought of substitution, but, on the contrary, for

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the sake of greater solidity, one felt an urge to repeat it all from the very foundation of things, only still more dashingly, with greater fire and more purpose. An urge to restate it in one volley, which without passion was unthinkable, for passion kept side-stepping, so what one got was something new. Yet the new arose not to take the place of the old, as men customarily think, but, quite the contrary, as an ecstatic reproduction of the model. Such was the nature of art. But what of the generation?

The lads of my generation were thirteen in 1905, and in their twenty-second years when the 1914-1917 war began. Both their critical periods coincided with red-letter periods of the country's history. Their puberty and their call-up coming of age at once acquired the counter-signature of a transitional epoch. Our age was stitched through and through with their nerves and graciously placed by them at the disposal of the elderly and the very young.

When I came back from abroad, the hundredth anniversary of the *Fatherland War* (against Napoleon) was being celebrated. The railway from Brest had been rechristened the Alexander Railway. The stations were all done out in white and the men on duty who saw our train through were decked out in clean tunics. The station building at Kubinka was flag-bedecked and the sentries at the exit were reinforced. In the immediate neighbourhood a supreme inspection was in progress, and for the occasion the platform was bright with a brilliant layer of soft gravel, in places still unrolled.

In the passengers all this excited no remembrance of the events being celebrated. Those jubilee decorations breathed the principal feature of the whole reign—our indifference to our own history. For, if those celebrations were reflected in any respect at all, it was not the progress of ideas, but that of our train, which engaged attention, since this was held up at every station and the time-table put out still more by contrary signals between stations.

Involuntarily my mind turned to Serov, who had died the previous winter, and his stories of the imperial family at the time of writing, and to caricatures made by artists at sketching

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parties at the Yusupovs', to the strange business that accompanied the Kutepov edition of *The Imperial Hunt*, and many another appropriate little detail connected with the art school, which came under the Ministry of the Imperial Court and in which our family spent some twenty years. I might also have recalled 1905, the Kasatkın family tragedy and my own trifling revolutionizing, which never went farther than daring a Cossack whip and being struck with it across my quilted overcoat. Finally, regarding those sentries, those stations and that bunting, they of course were heralds of the most serious drama of all, proving in no wise to be the innocent light-opera act which my frivolous a-political outlook of the time understood them to be.

I might even say that it was altogether an a-political generation, were I not aware that the trifling section of it with which I had any dealings was quite insufficient to assess the intelligentsia by. What I will say is that this was the side turned towards me. But it also turned the same side to the times as it came out with its first declarations of its own science, its philosophy and its art.

II

Culture, however, is not a maiden that falls into the open arms of the first man willing. All of which I speak had to be taken by struggle. The concept of love as a duel fits here too. Art could pass to the young only as the result of a militant infatuation experienced as a personal event in all its excitement. The literature of the beginners was bright with indications of that state. The new writers united in groups and these fell into the followers-on and the innovators. Inconceivable separately, they were all parts of that urge, adumbrated with such insistence that it had begun to impregnate all around it with the atmosphere of a novel which was not merely a matter of promise, but was actually being realized. The epigones offered an infatuation devoid of fire or talent, the innovators a militancy actuated by nothing more than

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castrated hatred. It was a case of the words and gestures of serious discussion being picked up by a monkey and, if disseminated wherever possible, yet in scattered fashion, fragmented, without a hint of the sense which really inspired the storm.

Meanwhile the air was already full of an awareness that there was to be a chosen child of fortune. One could almost assert what he was going to be, though it was still impossible to say who he would be. Outwardly, dozens of young men were equally restive. They thought alike, and alike they all strained after originality. But as in the movements of all ages, this was merely the unanimity of so many lottery tickets being whirled round and mixed in the drum. But, the moment that any one of those slips of paper should break free from the rotating medley and, appearing at the orifice of the drum, blaze out with fortuitous triumph, an individual plus a designation, the movement would be fated to remain for ever a movement, that is to say, an interesting example of mechanical transposition of chances. The movement became known as futurism. The victor and justification of the draw was Mayakovsky.

III

We made each other's acquaintance in the constraining atmosphere of group prejudice. A considerable time before this, just as one poet does exhibit another, J. Anisimov had shown me his verse in *A Warren of Judges*. But this took place in the epigone circle known as *Lirika*. The epigones, however, were not ashamed of their enthusiasms, and in that particular circle Mayakovsky was a discovery, a phenomenon of a proximity that promised much, something big.

In the innovators' group known as *Centrifuga*, on the other hand, of which soon after this I became a member, I learned (this was in the spring of 1914) that Shershenevich, Bol'shakov and Mayakovsky were our enemies and a very serious showdown was on the boards. The prospect of a quarrel with a man who had one day suddenly filled me with

admiration and who from a distance had more and more attracted me, did not in the least astonish me, for that was just how the innovators were so original! All the winter the gestation of *Centrifuga* had been accompanied by endless squabbles. All the winter all I thought about was playing at group discipline, all I did was sacrifice taste and conscience to that. So once again I made ready to betray anything at all when the time came for it. But this time I had over-estimated my strength.

It was a sultry day at the end of May, and we were already at a table in an *Arbat* cake-shop, when, noisy and youthful, in came those three. They handed their hats to the doorkeeper and without in the least lowering the loud tone of their conversation, pitched to defeat the clamour of trams and lorries which they had just left, with a boisterous lack of ceremony they made their way straight towards us. They had lovely voices, and the subsequent declamatory line of poetry originated thence. They were also very smartly dressed, whereas we were carefree. In every respect the enemy position was magnificent.

While Bobrov wrangled with Shershenyevich—the point was that on some occasion they had touched us on the raw, we had replied still more savagely, and all this needed clearing up—I contemplated Mayakovsky. I simply could not take my eyes off him. I think this was the very first time I saw him close to.

His substitution of an open short 'e' for 'a' in his pronunciation, making his diction vibrate like a sheet of steel-plate, was a histrionic trait. His deliberate curtness could easily have been taken as the distinguishing mark of a number of other callings or conditions. Nor was he the only impressive one. Beside him sat his companions. One of these, like Mayakovsky, also played the dandy, the other, like him, was also a real poet. But those resemblances did not diminish Mayakovsky's exceptional quality. Rather did they emphasize it. He did not stake one feature alone, but all at once, and instead of playing a part, he played life itself. This latter quality—without which his final end would have been unthink-

able—came out at the first glance, and it was precisely this that rivetted one to him

Although one can always see the whole of any man if walking or standing still, that circumstance would suddenly seem miraculous when Mayakovsky appeared. It made everybody turn round to look at him. In his case what was perfectly natural seemed supernatural. It was not his stature itself, but another feature, more general and less tangible. To a greater degree than other people he was all expression. There was in him as much expression and finality as in most people there is little, only in rare moments, indeed, solely in instants of special shock, emerging from the mist of unfermented intentions and unmaterialized proposals. He seemed always to be existing in the morrow after a spiritual life lived to the full, storing up for any possible event, and everybody always found him in the throes of its natural consequences. When he sat down he treated a chair like a motor cycle, leaning forward, a Viennese cutlet he would slash to pieces and gobble down, when he played cards his head was motionless, his eyes askance, he would parade down the Kutznetzki boulevard with tremendous style, in a hollow voice he would nasally intone, like a liturgy, any scrap of particularly profound thinking, his own or anyone else's, he frowned and he loomed, he travelled about and he acted, and behind it all, in the depths, as in the wake of a skater flying off at a tangent, one invariably sensed there was a day that was his alone and had preceded all other days, a day in which he had acquired that astounding momentum, which lent him that tremendous unforced unswerving trajectory. Behind his way of holding himself one could feel something akin to a decision when this is put into action and the consequence has become ineluctable. His quality of genius was a decision of this sort. When at some previous time he had come up against that quality, it made such an impression on him that for all time it had become his schedule of themes, his time-table, to the fulfilment of which he had given himself without pity or hesitation.

But he was still young, and the forms destined for those themes of his were ahead. The themes were insatiable and

would permit of no delay. For this reason, to assuage them, his first task was to outstrip his own future. Such an outstripping, when realized in the first person, is posing.

Of all those poses, as natural in a world of supreme self-expression as rules of decent conduct are in life, he chose the pose of outward purposiveness, most difficult for the artist, but for friends and acquaintances the most noble. That pose he maintained with such perfection that it is now almost impossible to give a characterization of the reverse side.

Nevertheless, the driving force of his lack of shyness was a terrible shyness, and under his pretended purposiveness there was concealed a phenomenally suspicious lack of will, with an inclination to causeless gloom. Just as deceptive was the mechanism of that yellow blouse of his. It was in no sense an aid for combating middle-class black-coatedness, but for combating that black velvet quality of his innate gifts, the mawkishly black-eyed forms of which began to outrage him sooner than happens with less gifted people. Since nobody knew as he did all the triviality of a spontaneous combustion which is not fanned little by little to great flames by cold water, or that the passion which suffices for the perpetuation of the species is insufficient for creative art, since this needs the passion requisite for the perpetuation of the image of the species, that is to say, a passion inwardly in the shape of the passions themselves and a novelty inwardly akin to a new promise.

Suddenly the *pourparlers* ceased. The enemies whom we should have destroyed departed unreformed. Or rather, the conditions elaborated by the settlement were humiliating for us.

Meanwhile, it had grown dark outside. It began to drizzle. Now our enemies had gone, the cake-shop became drearily empty. Flies became noticeable, fragments and crumbs on plates, glasses dimmed by hot milk. But no storm broke. The sun shone sweetly on wainscoting crinkled by fine purple peas. It was May, 1914. The shifts of history were so close. But who gave a thought to them? The crass city glowed with enamel-paint and tin-foil. Just like Rimsky's *Golden Cockerel*.

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The varnished green of the poplars glistened. For the last time colours had that poisonous herbal quality they were soon to part with for ever. I was crazy about Mayakovsky and was already lost without him. Need I add that those I did betray were not at all those I intended?

IV

Chance brought us together the very next day under the awning of the *Café Grec*. The great yellow boulevard stretched out, prone like a sheet between Pushkin and Nikitskaya Street. Stretching and then tucking their muzzles away more comfortably on their forepaws, emaciated long-tongued dogs yawned. Nurses put their heads together, settling one person's fate and lamenting another's. Butterflies momentarily folded their wings and relaxed in the heat, then, drawn away to one side by the irregular waves of the heat, flew on again. No doubt wringing wet, a little girl in white maintained herself in mid-air by lashing her whole self behind her heels with orbits of a skipping rope.

I sighted Mayakovsky from afar off and pointed him out to Loks. He was tossing for money with Khodasevich. At that moment Khodasevich stood up, paid up what he had lost, and went off under the awning towards Strastnoy Boulevard, leaving Mayakovsky alone at his table. We went in, bid him good day and got into conversation. After a few moments he suggested he recited something.

Green were the poplars. A dryish grey the limes. Their patience at an end from fleas, the drowsy dogs leapt to all fours, called Heaven to witness their moral impotence against brute force, and stretched out in the sand in a condition of outraged drowsiness. Locomotives on the Brest Railway, now re-christened the Alexander line, uttered throaty whistles. And all around us barbers barbered, bakers baked, cooks roasted, shopkeepers kept shop, people moved around and all of them were utterly ignorant of everything.

It was the *Vladimir Mayakovsky* tragedy, only just out. I

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was beside myself, holding my breath, my heart a-flutter, as I listened. I had never heard anything like it before.

It contained everything: the boulevard, the dogs, the poplars and the butterflies. Barbers, bakers, tailors and locomotives. To what purpose quote? We all remember that stifling, mysterious, summery text, now at everybody's disposal in its tenth reprint.

Far off locomotives bellowed like grampuses. The throaty realm of Mayakovsky's creation contained just the same unconditional distance as our world. Here was that bottomless spiritualization without which there is no originality, here that endlessness of view from every point of life and in any direction, without which poetry is merely a misunderstanding merely requiring clarification.

And how simple it all was! Art was called a tragedy. Just what it ought to be called. And the tragedy was called Vladimir Mayakovsky. That title concealed a brilliantly simple discovery, that a poet is not the author, but the subject of lyric poetry, addressing the world in the first person. The title was not the name of the man who wrote it, but the surname of the contents.

V

There was no doubt about it, it was from the *Café Grec* that day that I bore the whole of him off, away into my own life. But he was enormous, and there was no feasibility of keeping him to myself. And gradually I lost him. Then he began to remind me of himself. By his *Cloud in Trousers*, by his *Backbone Flute*, by *War and Peace*, by *Man*. What evaporated in the intervals, however, was so tremendous that extra-special reminders were essential. And such they indeed were. Every one of the stages I list found me unprepared. At each, having grown up out of all knowledge, he was born as entirely anew, as he had been the first time. It was absolutely impossible to get used to him.

VI

I left that café to go home charged with something utterly new. My room at the time overlooked the Kremlin. At all hours Nikolai Aseyev used to look in to see me, coming on from visiting the S—— sisters, a gifted household of the broadest culture. In Aseyev I used to admire a fancy brilliant in all its disorderliness, an ability, indeed, to make music from ideas however frivolous. He had all the sensitivity and guile of the true man of the footlights and I was very fond of him. He was much taken up with Khlebnikov. I cannot fathom what he found in me. From art, as well as from life, we two looked for very different things.

Green were the poplars, and reflections of gold and of white stone fluttered lizard-like over the waters of Moskva river as I cut through the Kremlin to Pokrovka, to the station, thence to the Baltrushaitises. They had a place on the Oka in Tula province. Close at hand also lived Viacheslav Ivanov, and the other summer inhabitants of the district also belonged to the world of art*. The lilac was still in bloom. Hurrying out a long way up the road towards the station, that gracious lady had just finished arranging an informal reception—no band, no ceremonial bread-and-salt—and this followed me all along the broad entrance to the property. Beyond still stretched a long reach of empty, cattle-trodden open pasture, patchy and poor.

The summer promised to be hot, a summer of plenty. For the Chamber Theatre (Kamerny Theatre) which had just been formed, I was translating Kleist's comedy, *The Broken Pitcher*. The park was full of snakes. They were a constant topic. One had snakes with one's fish stew and snakes with one's bathe. But when I was asked to tell them about myself, I talked about Mayakovsky. That was no error. I denied him. For me he was the personification of my spiritual horizon. The first man I recall making a comparison with Hugo's over-exaggeration was Viacheslav Ivanov.

* Including E. V. Muratova.

VII

When war was declared, the weather turned bad, rains began and the first tears of the womenfolk flowed. War was still a novelty and thereby a nasty jolt. People did not quite know how to take it. Plunging into a war was rather like taking one's first summer dip in icy water. The passenger trains taking local men to call-up centres left by the old timetable. A train pulled out, to be followed, banging its head on the rails, by a surge of unnaturally tender lamenting, not at all like ordinary sobbing, and bitter as rowan berries. And ready hands took charge of a middle-aged woman in no summer fashion much bundled in shawls. With monosyllabic deprecation the service man's relations led her back to the station building. Such lamenting, which was maintained only during the first few months, was vaster far than the grief of the young wives and mothers which it expressed. By special train it ran all along the line, station-masters saluted it when it came in sight, the telegraph poles let it pass. Visible from all sides in the leaden countenance of the foul weather, it transformed the whole countryside, for it was a thing of burning fierceness, untouched since former wars, a thing to which people had become unused, but had been dragged out overnight from some secret place, to cart it down to the station, but which as soon as they could they would lead away again and through mire-deep forest rides transport back to its home. Thus did people see off their kith and kin travelling far away to the great town in those green coaches, singly or in batches with fellow-villagers.

Those become soldiers already, making their way there, into terror itself, in ready-formed campaign units, were met and seen off without vociferation. Tight-harnessed from head to toe down they leapt, now in no peasant fashion, from the high-up cattle trucks, out on to the sand, spurs clinking, their sideways-slung rolled overcoats flapping in their wake. Others stood at the partitions in horse-boxes, patting the animals which with proudly pawing hoofs plucked into the muddy

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timbers of the half-rotted floor. The platform had no apples for giving away, it had a ready answer, flushing scarlet and grinning into the corners of tightly bunched kerchiefs

September drew to its close. Broken by winds and ruthlessly climbing nutters, the bent down refuse-golden hazels glowed with mud-splashed fire in the hollows, a dismal image of destruction, every joint torn in stubborn resistance to misfortune.

One August midday the spoons and forks on the terrace had turned green, dusk lay over the flower-beds, the birds were stilled. Then the sky began to peel off that vanishing-cap, that bright net of night deceitfully cast over everything. Defunct, the park squinted menacingly up at the humiliating conundrum which had transformed the whole of that world, whose noisy fame it so fastuously imbibed with all its roots, into a discarded thing. Out along the path came a hedgehog, on it, like an Egyptian hieroglyph, a knotted piece of string, a dead viper. The hedgehog dislodged it, then shook it suddenly off, then for a moment was still. A moment later he burrowed into the dry pine needles, rooting them over, out-thrusting and in-drawing his snout. And for the whole duration of the eclipse he rummaged with paw and snout alternately in the mass of prickly enigma, until the heralding of a return to unambiguity drove him back into his hole.

VIII

That winder, one of the S—— sisters, Z. M. M——v, moved to the Tverski Boulevard. We used to go to see her. Another frequent visitor was that remarkable musician (I was a personal friend of his) I. Dobrovein. Mayakovsky too used to call. By then I had grown quite used to the idea of seeing in him the leading poet of our generation. Time was to show that I was not mistaken. True, Khlebnikov too, with his subtle genuineness. But some of his merits are still a closed book to me because, poetry, as I understand it, in the last resort takes place within history, in co-operation with real life.

Severianin, too, came round, a lyricist who poured out his

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poetry in stanzas of immediate impact, like Lermontov's. But for all his careless triviality he nevertheless made a powerful impression, precisely by the rare perfection of his frank, all-on-the-surface talent.

But the peak of poetic fortune was Mayakovsky, as was later to be confirmed. Every time in the years following that our generation achieved dramatic expression and let a poet speak out, whether it was Yesenin, Selvinski or Marina Tzvetaya, one could catch their kinship with the Mayakovsky strain precisely in their ties with their generation, that is to say, in the way they addressed the world from out of their own time. I say nothing of such masters as Tikhonov or Aseyev, because here and from now on I am limiting myself to the dramatic line, closer to me, while they chose another for themselves.

Mayakovsky rarely came alone. As a rule his suite consisted of futurists, men of the movement. In Z. M. M.'s house I met my first primus stove. That invention so far did not exude any stench, and who would have thought it was going so to befoul life or be so widely used? That cleanly-roaring little container hissed out its high-pressure flames on all sides, and over it, one after the other, chops were fried, the elbows of our hostess and her assistants glowing with a Caucasian tan. When we left the dining-room to see how the ladies were getting on, the wretched little kitchen became an expedition to *Tierra del Fuego*, and with all the necessary forms we all bowed down to that brass pancake embodying something so bright, so Archimedean. And off we ran to buy vodka and beer. In the drawing-room, a tall Christmas-tree reached out its arms towards the piano in secret conniving with the trees of the boulevard. It was still triumphantly black, but the whole divan was smothered with glittering baubles, as if sweetmeats, some still in their cardboard boxes. We had been specially invited to help decorate the tree. To come in good time, in the morning, if possible. Which meant about three in the afternoon. Mayakovsky recited, made everybody laugh, wolfed his supper, impatient to be at the cards. He was bitingly gallant and concealed his constant

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excitement with great skill. Something was happening to him, some sort of climacteric coming to its height. He was beginning to realize for what he was destined. He posed openly, but with such unrevealed alarm and feverishness that the pose was beady with a cold perspiration.